



# The Work of Prayer



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## The Work of Prayer

**Quarterly Aim:** The pupil will gain new insight into the working of prayer and will be challenged to deepen personal, private and public prayer.

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# Prayer, Speaking to God

## APPLICATION

Prayer is worship of God, seeking God's will, thanksgiving, asking a petition and supplication.

## SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Matthew 6:9-13.

Related Scripture: Genesis 20:17; Exodus 33:12-23; Job 42:9, 10; Daniel 6:10; Matthew 6:5-8, 14, 15; Luke 18:1-8; John 17:1-26; Philippians 4:6, 7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 5:13-18.

Devotional Reading: Teach Us To Pray, Luke 11:1-13.

## Introduction

Communication is important in the world today. Remaining close to someone requires times of conversation. In this quarterly, we will study the subject of communication—not communication with other people but with God. Many Christians rarely talk with their Heavenly Father. Jesus was faithful to talk with the Father. He taught “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). Failure to pray displays a life out of touch with God. Prayer must be more than a tool of emergency you use in times of great difficulty. It must be a vital part of your everyday life.

The Bible gives many examples of people who prayed regularly. King David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). How did he achieve such a lofty reputation? It was partly because he spent much time in prayer. He prayed “evening, and morning, and at noon” (Psalm 55:17). Daniel was another Old Testament saint who saw the importance of prayer. He had been taken captive to Babylon. He could have turned against God.

Instead, he was faithful in prayer. A time came when the king passed a law forbidding prayer to anyone but him. Daniel did not deviate from his practice of prayer. He went home, opened his window toward Jerusalem and prayed three times a day (Dan. 6:10). He let nothing keep him from communicating with God. A New Testament character of prayer was James. Tradition reveals that he spent so much time on his knees in prayer that he gained the nickname, “Old Camel Knees.” Prayer was so important to him that he devoted much of the day to the practice of it.

Prayer is important for God’s children today. The Bible is His communication with us. Prayer is our communication with Him. Since He is our Heavenly Father, it is needful to have continuous dialogue with God. What should be included in our prayers?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ **Prayer Is Worship**

Many people only think of worship as what takes place when church members gather for a public service. They sing songs, listen to the message and rejoice in the goodness of God. They never consider prayer to be an act of worship. The Model Prayer Jesus taught included worship and praise.

The Model Prayer began with exalting God for who He is—“Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9). One of the essential traits of God is His holiness. He is the essence of absolute moral perfection. None can compare to His holiness. When God had brought the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage and had drowned the army of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, Moses offered a song of praise to God. “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Ex. 15:11). He is not subject to man’s standard of morality. God is the source of all moral excellence. “There is none holy as the LORD” (1 Sam. 2:2). No one compares to Him.

What reaction does the holiness of God produce in our hearts? Isaiah received a vision of the glory, majesty and holiness of God. He beheld “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1). The angels surrounding the throne cried out in worship, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (verse 3). Isaiah could only proclaim, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine

eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (verse 5). The holiness of God was so intense that Isaiah could not stand in His presence. He was profoundly humbled at the sight.

Not only did Jesus begin His example of prayer with a statement of worship, He also concluded it with praise. "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Matt. 6:13). What is the value of declaring the greatness of God at the beginning and ending of our prayers? When we view Him in all His glory, we will approach Him with reverence. To come to God in prayer with an attitude of entitlement is to insult His holiness. We should declare His worthiness in our prayers. That will give the proper attitude in prayer.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Prayer Is Asking**

Though we should not use prayer solely as a wishing well, there is a place for us to make requests to God. Jesus gave the example of asking God to provide our daily needs. Too many people think their daily provisions come as a result of great efforts they put forth. They have a car because they work hard. They have food on the table because of their own efforts. Everything in life comes as a result of God's blessings. So is it wrong to make requests of God? "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6).

Jesus said for us to pray for our daily bread. This kind of prayer helps to change the attention from self to God. We need to realize that our daily provisions come from Him. As we ask for food to eat and clothes to wear, we are showing our reliance on Him. This helps us grow in faith.

We should also pray for the needs of others. Job was a man who faced difficult days. His health was broken and his life had fallen apart. Yet, when God revealed Himself to Job, he quickly offered up prayers for his friends (Job 42:10). His mind had been on his own calamities. Now his thoughts were turned from self to others. We might have a friend or acquaintance facing some dreaded disease. We can do little to cure the disease, but we can lift that person to the throne of grace.

Moses constantly prayed for the needs of the Israelites. On one occasion the people had rebelled against God by creating a golden calf to worship. God's anger was hot against the nation.

God threatened to remove His presence from the people. Moses interceded for the people. “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence” (Ex. 33:15).

Being frail human beings, we are in great need each day. If we tried to make it on our own, we would utterly fail. It is needful for us to bring our petitions before God. In His great love, He will help by granting what is beneficial to a life for Christ.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Prayer Is Confession**

People are prone to sin. Some people claim to live without sin. This is simply not true. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8, 10). No one (outside of Christ) is perfect. So what should we do when sin arises in our lives?

Jesus made the statement, “Forgive us our debts” (Matt. 6:12). This pictures a person who has borrowed money. Jesus gave the example of a man who had borrowed a vast amount from his master. He had no means to repay and begged for forgiveness. The master completely forgave the indebtedness. This is where we stand. We cannot repay God for the horrible sins we commit. His holiness cannot even look on sin to behold it (Hab. 1:13). The debt of sin must be paid. But God has already taken care of it. “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Sinful humanity can do nothing to offset the depravity of sin. The best we can accomplish in life is nothing more than filthy rags in the eyes of God (Isa. 64:6). So God has provided the means of forgiveness through His Son.

Have you asked God’s forgiveness for your daily sins? Please do not insult God by declaring you have no sins. That statement declares Him to be a liar. Instead of proclaiming your own innocence, you should come into His presence and beg His forgiveness. Only then can your life begin to count for Him.

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ **Prayer Is Seeking God’s Direction**

Jesus taught His disciples to pray that God would direct them in proper paths. “Lead us not into temptation” (Matt. 6:13). We know that God does not tempt people with evil (James 1:13). Jesus taught His disciples to ask God to lead them in right paths. This aspect of the prayer was given so that we might begin to focus on where we need to go in service to God.

He will always lead us in the right direction (John 16:13). This almost seems to be a plea to direct our minds so they will focus on right actions. It is sometimes difficult to know the right things to do. We should pray that God will help us know right from wrong. Then our lives will have a greater impact in the world.

## **Conclusion**

Prayer is communication with God. It is a time when we want to show Him what we think of Him. It is a time when we bring our needs before Him. It is a time when we ask His help and guidance in our lives. Prayer helps to focus our attention on the One who is worthy of all glory and praise. It is not about us, but about Him. How do your daily prayers measure up to this marvelous example given by Jesus? He teaches us how we can have better communication with the Father. Why not practice by entering a time of prayer right now? You will be blessed by your communion with the Father.

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# Praying for a Child

## APPLICATION

To encourage God's people to pray for specific things.

## SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 1 Samuel 1:9-11.

Related Scripture: Genesis 17:18-20; 24:15-27; 2 Kings 19:20;

Psalms 42:4; 62:8; Lamentations 2:19; Daniel 9:16-19.

Devotional Reading: Hannah Vows a Vow, 1 Samuel 1:1-28.

## Introduction

The story of Hannah and her prayer for a son is one that captures the heart of every parent. She had a deep-seated desire to have a child. Her intense longing overwhelmed all other thoughts in her life. She had been faithful in her worship of Jehovah. She had been a faithful wife; yet, still she remained childless. Hannah took her desire before God and made her request to Him. Surely, He would give her the desires of her heart (Psalm 37:4). The lesson Text relates the prayer she uttered before the Lord.

Too many parents do not consider the need of prayer for and about their children. They should pray for God's help in raising the children so they will desire to serve the Lord. Jesus encouraged His disciples to pray for more laborers to enter the harvest (Matt. 9:38). It is sad to think that a parent would pray for workers but would refuse to pray for their children to be servants. Hannah's desire for a child did not keep her from dedicating him to the service of the Lord. This is an important attitude for any parent to have.

The Bible gives many examples of parents who prayed for their children. Abraham prayed for God to bless his sons (Gen. 17:18-21). Job was concerned about the behavior of His children. To assure their right relationship with God, he offered sacrifices on their behalf (Job 1:5). This undoubtedly included pleas with God on their behalf. We can consider young Timothy being raised by his mother. Her prayers for him must have been constant. A parent's prayer is needful in the lives of all their children. How should a parent pray?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ **A Contrite Prayer**

The burden of Hannah's heart was deep. She ached for a son. Year after year she waited for a son to be born. She came to the house of God to offer her prayer in His presence. She came "in bitterness of soul" and "wept sore" (1 Sam. 1:10). This was not some superficial, trivial matter. It touched the core of her person. She poured herself into this prayer.

Prayer often is little more than an afterthought. It happens before you go to sleep. You offer a quick, unfelt prayer. It is a matter of habit. The Bible equates prayer with a burden of the heart. "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me" (Psalm 42:4). God is the Rock and refuge of the soul. Because of His protective strength, people can "pour out your heart before him" (Psalm 62:8). This phrase *pour out* gives the idea of something being spilled. When a person's heart is at the point of breaking, it feels like it is being spilled on the ground for others to walk on. This is the attitude people should have for the needs of their children. When you sit in the hospital holding your five-week-old baby in your arms with tubes running to the tiny body, you pour out your heart to God. When you watch your adult child's life fall apart and know there is nothing you can do to solve his or her problems, you spill your heart to God. Any loving parent would take the hurts rather than let the child experience the pain, but sometimes all they can do is pray.

How much do you pray for your children? What kind of prayers do you offer for them? The depth of your love is best expressed in your prayers. They might need guidance in making a career decision. Your children might need strength to refuse to go along with the crowd. They might be facing an illness and need God's help in overcoming the disease. Whatever the need,

you can best help your children by bringing them into the presence of Almighty God. There is nothing too difficult for Him (Jer. 32:17).

2. \_\_\_\_\_ **A Concerned Prayer**

Hannah spoke her specific need to the Lord. This was a burden of her soul. She called her feelings an affliction (depression or misery). The weight on her spirit was so intense it tried to overwhelm her. She could not solve her own problem. She turned to the Lord with her specific longing.

People often pray without conveying the burdens of the heart. They go through the motions of speaking with God but do not tell Him what is in their spirit. They rationalize this by saying God already knows all our needs. While that is true, He does expect us to bring our petitions to Him. The generic prayers do little to express our burdens. People pray, "Lord, heal the sick and save the lost." That prayer is too unspecific to be answered. When I pray for my friend who is lost, I can see when that person trusts Jesus as Savior. I can even play a role in God's answer to the prayer. When we pray specifically, then we can rejoice over the answer to our prayers.

When was the last time you were so concerned over something that you prayed specifically for that matter? We should follow the example given by Hannah as she prayed for a son. She did not just pray that God would make her feel better. She wanted a son and prayed for one.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ **A Committed Prayer**

Hannah's prayer was one of commitment to the Lord. She wanted a son, and she was willing to let her son be used by God. This was a marvelous attitude to have toward her family. She knew the blessedness that came from being a mother, but she also knew God's work was more important than her maternal longing. She was willing for God to take her son and use him.

Often, when we pray for something, we think nothing of how it will affect the work of the Lord. This shows a lack of commitment to Him and His work. Instead, we should always pray in a manner that brings Him glory. Life does not revolve around our desires. Instead, it revolves around the Lord's will. This is the way our prayers and our lives should be directed (James 4:15). Even Jesus prayed in this manner. As He approached the

hour of His arrest, trial and crucifixion, Jesus prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). Jesus was only concerned with accomplishing the will of God. This is what commitment really is. It is not a person's desire for personal advancement. It is not seeking the way of safety and pleasure. Commitment desires God's will above all things.

Hannah's prayer showed her commitment to God. Her desire was to have a son to care for. Her commitment was for God's will to be accomplished. She would willingly lend her son to God so that His work would be advanced. This was a prayer of commitment.

#### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ **A Completed Prayer**

Hannah's prayer was heartfelt and genuine. She cared about God and His work. She was willing to do anything to accomplish God's will. God granted her petition and a child was born to Hannah and her husband. This child was Samuel. She cared for her child and nurtured him while he was a baby. At the appropriate time, she brought Samuel to the high priest, Eli. Samuel would serve God the rest of his days. "As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there" (1 Sam. 1:28).

Our prayers demand a willingness to follow through. We might pray for a dear friend to be saved. Our concern should compel us to go and talk to that friend. It might be God's will for us to be the tool to reach that person. Our prayers should reveal our concern and should motivate us to go to them with the gospel. Sometimes that commitment will have a cost attached. Hannah's prayer cost her constant companionship with her son. Hannah lived in Bethlehem while Samuel would be at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. This was a journey of about twenty-five miles. Their custom was to go to the Tabernacle once a year. Hannah gave up much when she followed through in her commitment to the Lord.

We should always pray for God's will to be accomplished in the lives of our children. One preacher prayed for God's will to be accomplished in the lives of his sons and did not get what he expected. One son served as a missionary in the Philippines while another served in China. There can be a cost when asking

God to use our children, but the cost is worthwhile. The benefits are eternal.

## **Conclusion**

Parents have an awesome responsibility. They bring children into the world and should endeavor to bring them up in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). This is not always an easy task. Parents must pray for God’s will in their children’s lives from the time they are born. This means the parents will endeavor to teach them the right way to live. Parents will place them in God’s hand no matter what His will might be. This is sometimes difficult, but it is the best thing both for parents and child.

Hannah gave an excellent example to follow. She wanted a child, but she also wanted the child to be used by God. She willingly placed him in a position of service so he could accomplish God’s purpose for his life. Though she faced a cost, she gladly offered him to God. Each parent should pray for God to have His way in the lives of the children. They are a gift from God, and we should return them as our gift to God.

## Praying in God's House

### APPLICATION

To encourage God's people in New Testament churches to pray for God's presence in every service and every action of His people to be God honoring.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 1 Kings 8:22-53; 9:1-9.

Related Scripture: Deuteronomy 12:10-14; Psalms 5:7; 30; Ezekiel 37:21-28; Daniel 6:10; Acts 2:41-47; Hebrews 10:24, 25.

Devotional Reading: The Church Prays for Peter's Deliverance, Acts 12:5-17.

### Introduction

When David had appointed his son to follow him as king of Israel, David had a specific plan for him to follow. He had wanted to build a house of worship for the God of Israel. God had refused to let David build the house, but He did promise that his son would have that responsibility. After Solomon ascended to the throne, he began building the Temple. Its beauty was a reflection of the glorious God who was worshiped there.

What was so special about the structure built by Solomon and his workers? The Temple was not special because of the pattern of its building. It was not extraordinary because of the materials used. It was different from other buildings because it was dedicated to God. In the same way, a church building is special because it is dedicated to God. People gather there to meet with and worship God. Ezekiel related a vision from the Lord. In it, God lifted His presence from the Temple in Jerusalem. Without

the presence of the Lord upon it, it was nothing more than a building with a corrupted purpose. Without the presence of the Lord meeting His people there, a church building loses its value. We must never exclude the Lord from His house.

Is there any real benefit for God's people coming together for prayer in the house of God? There was a time when a church's Wednesday night service was called "Prayer Meeting." The members gathered for a time of Bible study and then brought the church's petitions before God. Sometimes these prayer meetings would last for hours. Their prayers joined together into a mighty force in the presence of the Lord. The lesson Text shows Solomon's entering a time of prayer in the house of God. His prayer can teach us lessons concerning corporate prayer in the house of God.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

**Dedication**

Solomon's prayer was much more than a plea for God's blessings for the king. Solomon wanted the entire congregation to be committed to the Lord.

Solomon expressed God's greatness and his unworthiness. This was an expression of worship to the Lord. No one compares to the wonder of the eternal God (1 Kings 8:23). Solomon specifically mentioned the trustworthiness and faithfulness of God. He keeps His covenants and promises. The Lord told David about His plan to extend his dynasty by bringing his son to the throne. This was a perpetual promise. No one would ever properly sit on the throne of Israel apart from David's descendant. This promise challenged the people to remain faithful to God. "That they walk before me as thou hast walked before me" (verse 25). He wanted the people to be committed to the Lord. Sometimes we will offer a similar prayer while we are alone with God. We ask Him to help us accomplish a life of service to Him. There is an additional benefit to offering God this prayer while in His congregation. Offering a prayer of commitment in a church service is a public confession of God. It shows others the special burden in your life and gives them the opportunity to join you in prayer. The Preacher declared, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:12). People standing together are stronger than a person standing alone. When we join together

in prayer for dedication, those prayers have greater force. We should have joint prayer for commitment to God.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Dependency**

Solomon wanted the people to remember their covenant with God concerning the house of prayer. People tend to forget God in happy days. When their lives are smooth and without disruption, they are not likely to offer deeply felt prayers. Solomon wanted the people to have their minds constantly focused on God and His house.

Most people in the United States have plenty for life. They might not be wealthy, but they have what they need to live comfortably. They have plenty of food on the table. They have necessary clothing and a place to lay their heads at night. They do not worry about life because they have what they need. This makes people self-sufficient. Being dependent on self will lead to failure in life because the individual is not trusting the Lord. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). The disciples needed to depend on God for the smallest details of life. The Israelites, wandering in the wilderness, were dependent on God for their daily provisions. God brought them manna so they would have food. This continued for forty years. He was not late with His provision even one time. The people could depend upon Him.

Everything that comes in life is a blessing from God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). This needs to become reality to us. We do not have good things because we earn or deserve them. We have His blessings because He is a loving God.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Decision**

Solomon's prayer showed the importance of trusting and following the Lord. Solomon spoke of the time when the nation might turn away from God in rebellion. He would bring chastisement upon them. When the people realized their sin and turned to God in repentance, God would hear their prayer and forgive their sin.

The decision to follow the Lord must come from the individual heart. No one can be coerced into serving God. "If any man

will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Each person must make this daily decision. Each time a person arises from the bed, the decision comes. Each situation that comes in life brings a new decision. It is vital for the Christian to be in constant prayer concerning circumstances in life.

Does God really care about the little details in a person’s life? Solomon believed the Lord was concerned about everything that happened. When the people of Israel did wrong and received chastisement, God cared. When they repented and received forgiveness, God cared. This was the focus of a parable told by Jesus during His earthly ministry. The prodigal son rebelled against his father. He took his inheritance and wasted it in unholy acts. Yet, when he realized his sinfulness, the son returned to his father and asked for forgiveness. The father embraced the son and welcomed him back home. Our Heavenly Father always waits for us to return to Him. His arms are constantly open to receive us. His forgiveness is only waiting for our plea. We must decide to return to Him.

#### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ **Declaration**

In response to Solomon’s prayer, God offered a declaration of His purpose. God answers the prayers that come before Him. He does not ignore the petitions of His people. He is a loving and compassionate God who cares about the desires of His children.

God declared the Temple had been dedicated to Him. “I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever” (1 Kings 9:3). He would listen as prayers were sent toward this place. “Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (Isa. 56:7). God would hold the Temple perpetually as a house of prayer. Sadly, many Israelites grew to look at the Temple as nothing special. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, many people used the Temple as a place of profit. Jesus confronted the money changers because of their evil actions. “Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Mark 11:17). The Lord wanted people to respect His house as a place of prayer.

God also declared the Temple would be a place to testify of the coming Messiah (1 Kings 9:5). Prayers toward the Temple would remind people of the hallowed purpose of that building. This is

true in structures dedicated to the worship of the Savior today. Members of churches meet to honor the Messiah. The buildings in which we meet have been dedicated to this purpose. We should never fall away from the glorious purpose of our existence—drawing people toward the Savior.

## **Conclusion**

The Temple Solomon built had a spectacular purpose. It was the house of God and was dedicated to His worship. Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple showed how highly he thought of God. He wanted that structure to be solely for the purpose of drawing people toward the Lord. To that end, he asked God to honor the prayers offered in the Temple. It was not that the stones were especially holy or its design sacred. What set the Temple apart was its dedication to the Lord. It was His house. No one other than God could determine what should take place there. Because the Lord was in that place, prayers uttered toward it were special. They were being sent toward God.

Why is it special for prayers to be uttered while we are gathered in church? It is not that the boards, brick and mortar are especially sacred. The house has simply been dedicated to the Lord. It is no longer the possession of the people. It is God's house. When a church gathers there for worship, the Lord has promised to meet along with them (Matt. 18:20). When we join our prayers together and know God has joined with us, no greater power can be unleashed on earth. A church met to pray for Peter while he was in jail (Acts 12:5). Because of their faithfulness in prayer, God heard them and answered their petitions. Peter was wondrously released from his bonds.

# Praying Pastors

## APPLICATION

To exhort pastors to continually be in prayer for their office, people, morals, spirituality and doctrinal purity.

## SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Acts 6:4.

Related Scripture: Acts 2:42; Romans 1:9, 10; 12:12; Philip-  
pians 1:3-7; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5; 3:9-13.

Devotional Reading: Praying for the Church at Colossae,  
Colossians 1:3-14.

## Introduction

The setting of the lesson Text was early in the history of the church. The church at Jerusalem had grown tremendously. The diversity of personalities in the congregation stirred up trouble. Serving as the pastors of that large church, the apostles had the responsibility of handling the issues within the congregation. That church had on its rolls a significant number of widows who were supported by the church. The apostles spent an excessive amount of time dealing with them. Even then, it was not enough. They instructed the church to select seven men to take care of this problem. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Their focus should have been on spiritual matters rather than handling the material issues of the church.

Though many centuries have passed since that day, the role and work of the pastor has not changed. He is still to be the spiritual leader of the church he pastors. For him to accomplish

the task God has placed before him, he must be able to spend much time in prayer and ministry of the Word of God. The importance of the pastor's prayer life will be the focus of this lesson.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ **Pastors Are To Pray**

When Peter wrote his first letter, he instructed pastors and church members how to live for Christ. Pastors had the responsibility of "being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). The greatest illustration of this role came from Christ. As He lead and taught His early congregation, they learned not only by what they heard, but also by what they saw. They watched Jesus spend hours in prayer. On one occasion, as they watched Him pray, they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). They saw how important prayer was to Jesus.

Pastors must take the time to teach scriptural lessons on the methods and practice of prayer. But they must be more than fountains of information. Pastors must exhibit an active, vital prayer life if they expect the people to implement the practice. When a pastor prays during a church service, it should be reverent and specific so the people can see how prayer should be conducted. But those public prayers cannot be all there is. He must spend hours in private prayer offering up petitions on behalf of the congregation. The people should know he is concerned about their spiritual well-being. The pastor's ministry will not be as effective without constant, persistent prayers.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Pastors Are To Pray  
in Sermon Preparation**

The Bible admonishes the pastor to "feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly" (1 Peter 5:2). Paul warned the pastors of the church at Ephesus, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Jesus even instructed Peter, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15). The apostles took this directive to heart because they saw the importance of minister-

ing the Word to the congregation (lesson Text). How can the pastor accomplish the task of properly teaching the congregation?

The pastor should seek God's will concerning the message to be preached. Each church has different needs. One church might be strong in doctrine but lax in ministry. Another church might be strong in youth but weak in teaching. A pastor must carefully weigh the needs of a church. Prayer is vital in determining the most important issues within a church. A pastor should often pray as he prepares a message or series of messages. God will lead him in the right direction (John 16:13). It is God's church, and He has placed the pastor in the position. God cares enough to direct the pastor to speak on subjects needed by a congregation. The pastor must spend enough time in prayer to find the will of God.

After the sermon has been prepared, the pastor should spend additional time praying about the presentation of the message. It should be a burden in the heart of the preacher. If it has not touched the pastor's heart, then it will not touch the hearts of the listeners. He should pray about the words used in delivery. He should pray about the style of the delivery. He should pray that he will not be the focus of the message, but for the Lord to be the center of attention. When the pastor spends enough time praying for the preparation and presentation of the sermon, the congregation will be blessed by it.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Pastors Are To Pray To Live Godly Lives**

The world in which we live is a difficult place to have a Christ-honoring life. The pastor's life should be above reproach. Anytime a pastor falls into immorality, infidelity or instability, every pastor is affected. The writer of Hebrews penned words about this important matter in the relationship between pastor and church. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. 13:7). The congregation has the right to expect the pastor's life to be above reproach. This does not mean he is perfect, but his life should point toward Christ. With all the pressures on a pastor, it is even more difficult to do what is right. So what can he do?

The Model Prayer taught by Jesus set the right framework for a pastor's prayer life. One aspect of that prayer was, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). Satan laughs every time a pastor falls into a pattern of sin. He delights in the failures of God's leaders. It is vital for every pastor to have the words of Christ in his mind and on his heart every minute of every day. Attacks will come when they are least expected. If the pastor is not watchful, if he has not asked God for help in overcoming the wicked one, he will yield to temptation and his ministry will be destroyed. It is only through God's help that a man can overcome the fiery attacks of Satan (Eph. 6:16; 1 John 5:4).

This is a great challenge for the congregation as well. They should constantly be in prayer for the pastor so his life will be in submission to God. The prayers of the saints will help a pastor in living for Christ.

#### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ **Pastors Are To Pray for Wisdom**

The pastor is under the burden of leadership. He must carefully weigh decisions that come before the congregation. Making the right decision is vital for the smooth operation of a church. When Solomon ascended to the throne, God made him an offer. He let Solomon choose what he wanted to make his reign better. He could choose long life, great wealth or military strength. Solomon considered what he needed in leading the people. He came to God with a great request. "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" (1 Kings 3:9). He knew it was important to have the ability to make wise decisions in leading the people of God. A pastor needs the same kind of wisdom in leading the flock of God. From where does this wisdom come?

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). There is only one source of true wisdom. If a pastor is to gain the understanding needed to lead a congregation properly, he must go to God. Thankfully, He is willing to grant the understanding needed to make good decisions. God does not resent our requests for wisdom. When Solomon asked God for

wisdom, “the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing” (1 Kings 3:10).

Church members make decisions that impact the ministry of a church for years to come. A congregation might need to enter a building program. It might need an additional staff member. It might be faced with the need to relocate. These issues need wisdom and carefulness. It is appropriate for the pastor to pray diligently for God’s help in planning the right strategy to make the transition to the next level of ministry. Human intellect will often not be sufficient. It takes spiritual understanding. This can only come from the Lord. He loves when His pastors and churches approach Him with their needs. He will grant the wisdom liberally. He will not be stingy with His help. He is a loving Father. Pastors can and should pray for wisdom in making godly decisions.

## **Conclusion**

Prayer is communicating with God. Since the pastor’s role in the church is that of leadership and oversight, he needs to be in constant contact with the Father so he can lead in the proper way. God’s line of communication is always open. Each church should make sure the pastor has sufficient quiet time to spend in prayer. Each church might even provide a special time each year when its pastor can be alone for a week or two and spend time seeking the face of God for the church he pastors. This will help his ministry and will benefit the church as well. It will focus his attention where it needs to be—on Christ.

Pastors, make sure you give the necessary time to prayer. You cannot properly lead the congregation, you cannot adequately preach, you cannot fully minister the Word to the congregation without spending time on your face before God. Pastors must be examples in their prayer life.

## Praying for Missionaries

### APPLICATION

To admonish churches and God's people to pray before they send out missionaries and to continue to pray for them.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Romans 15:30, 31.

Related Scripture: Acts 4:23-31; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18-20; Philippians 4:6-14; Colossians 4:2-4; 2 Thessalonians 3:12.

Devotional Reading: Paul and Barnabas Receive Prayers, Acts 13:1-3.

### Introduction

The work of missionaries is the work of the churches. The Lord commissioned His churches to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15). This work is accomplished as churches send out missionaries with the intent of establishing churches. Sad to say, often mission work is undertaken without much forethought or prayer. The Lord showed the proper method when He called Paul and Barnabas to reach new cities with the gospel (Acts 13:2). These two men were sent out by the church at Antioch (verse 3). That church did not quickly jump into a situation they might later regret. The church members carefully and prayerfully sought the will of God prior to sending them out. Churches today should follow this example. They need a man who has been called by God to do the work. They need time to pray for God's guidance in doing mission work.

Mission work is not an easy task, but it is the work of every church.

Sometimes a church will catch the vision of a new work in a needed area. It will begin with much prayer and careful consideration. The people will set about to achieve their goal. When the fire of passion over a new endeavor is fresh, prayers are frequent and zealous. As time goes by, the fires fade in intensity and the prayers are sporadic and irregular. It is not that a church no longer sees the need. The initial excitement fades, and the prayers also diminish in importance.

The greatest work any individual or church can do for a missionary is constant, fervent prayer. If a person or a church will fervently and diligently pray for a missionary, that person and church will also embrace all the needs of that ministry. So prayer is an essential element in mission support. This lesson will focus the attention on certain areas churches and individuals should remember in prayer.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ **Praying for the Missionary**

Paul admonished the church at Rome to be diligent in their prayers for his work (lesson Text). He spoke of this request in many of his letters. Why is it vital for churches to be diligent in prayer for missionaries and other ministers?

The church at Jerusalem faced many difficulties. Soon a time of persecution arose. The apostles were arrested and commanded not to speak about Jesus. After their release, the apostles returned to the church and reported what had happened. The church prayed for its leaders so they would have strength to continue their work. God had the power to enable the ministers to complete their task. The church members asked God to give them the courage and boldness to continue preaching Jesus. God greatly answered the prayer and the church was strengthened and it grew. (See Acts 4:23-31.)

Churches should also be diligent to pray for additional laborers to enter the work of God. "Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). The task ahead is great. God needs more men to yield to His call to the ministry. Some people wonder whether God is still calling men into the ministry. God knows every place that needs a church. He is calling men

to fill these roles, but often they are not responding to His call. This should be a matter of prayer among churches and individual church members.

The call goes out right now to pray for missionaries, both those already on the field and those God is calling to enter the work. It might even be beneficial to pause right now and pray for the mission outreach of your church.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Praying for the Missionary's Work**

When missionaries submit to God's call to ministry, they are often called upon to leave familiar surroundings to enter a different field of labor. They might be going to a foreign field (as Paul did many times). They might be traveling to a different region of their homeland. Every work will bring changes. The missionary often feels alone even when surrounded by people. This is where God's people can aid that missionary. They can pray for the missionary and the work being accomplished.

Paul asked churches to join his ministry by praying for his work. He faced opposition in his work (Rom. 15:31), but God was greater than any difficulty. If God's people stood behind him, Paul would have success in reaching souls for Christ. When a person is preparing to grow a garden, he does not just start spreading the seed. Instead, the gardener will prepare the soil by breaking it up and fertilizing it. Then the seeds will have a greater opportunity for growth. Mission work often needs some time of preparation for the seed of the gospel to find root. Even Jesus talked about this great need. The seed sown in the properly prepared soil produced much fruit (Mark 4:20).

Paul also wanted the churches to pray for his preaching (Eph. 6:18-20). All preachers need the prayers of the saints to make their sermons more effective. If you are praying for the pastor, then you participate in his work. If you pray for a missionary, then you participate in his success. When we pray for a missionary to have an effective presentation of the gospel, we are partners in the work.

## 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Praying for the Missionary's Joy**

What was the joy of Paul's ministry? He took joy in the growth of those he reached. He wanted to come to the church at Rome and rejoice with them because they had joined with him in prayer. There are many blessings missionaries can experience.

When a missionary sees his work at a particular field of labor begin to grow both spiritually and numerically, there is joy in his heart. John felt this kind of happiness. "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father" (2 John 4). This brought a satisfaction to his heart (3 John 4). Many missionaries have watched as a small nucleus of believers began meeting together to learn God's will for their lives. When that small number begins to respond to the teaching and begins reaching out to others, satisfaction floods the heart of the missionary. This spiritual growth will draw others to Christ.

The prayers and support from other churches also bring joy to the heart of the missionary. Times of deputation are difficult on the missionary and his family. Long hours of travel, days between appointments and much time spent with strangers can be almost overwhelming. The prayers and kindnesses of churches can bring joy to the missionary and his family. Elijah became depressed when he thought he was alone (1 Kings 19:10, 14). God showed him seven thousand others who were faithful to God (verse 18). This assurance brought encouragement to his fainting heart. A missionary who knows people are praying for him experiences great joy.

4. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Praying for the Missionary's Refreshing and Peace**

A missionary doing the work of outreach to a community or country has an awesome, tiring task to accomplish. He spends many hours in the performance of his duties. Often his work will be almost continuous. Since he is alone in ministry, he has the responsibility of all spiritual leadership. This can almost be overwhelming at times. Those who support the missionary through prayer must take this into consideration.

Paul spoke of his desire to "be refreshed" (Rom. 15:32) with the people of the church in Rome. He had been working many years in reaching out with the gospel. When he came to that city, he was in bonds. They would have the opportunity to bring rest and refreshment to him. This is a great work churches can do for missionaries. Occasionally, they will return from the mission field for further deputation or reporting about the work accomplished. During such occasions, churches can offer a mis-

sionary a special time of rest and refreshment. If a person has a vacation home on the lake, the missionary might be given the opportunity to spend time alone with his family in that relaxing situation. If special seminars or retreats are available during these times, a church might pay for a missionary and family to attend. Churches can aid missionary families in bringing relaxation and refreshment to revitalize the ministry. God will bless churches that are willing to exert such a positive influence in the work of missionaries.

## Conclusion

What role does your church play in praying for missionaries? What role do you play in praying for missionaries? It is not only when a church gathers for worship that its members can pray for those engaged in reaching out with the gospel. When individual members are alone, they can bring the needs of missionaries before the throne of grace.

It is important for a church to carefully and prayerfully consider the task prior to sending out a missionary. A church should want to accomplish the task given by the Lord in the Great Commission. But it should want to do this work in the best way possible. It cannot be undertaken if a church is going to forget the missionary once he is on the field. A church must be willing to pray continually for the missionary and his family. This will strengthen the bond between the missionary and the sending church. It will help a church be more involved in specific needs of the outreach. It will be more responsive to burdens that might arise. Dedicated, faithful prayer for missionaries is as vital to reaching the world as giving money to their support. God's power is greater than the power of the dollar. When we are careful to include God on the team of reaching the world, it will become an accomplishable task.

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# Jesus Prays

## APPLICATION

To understand that Jesus believed and practiced prayer.

## SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: John 17:1-26.

Related Scripture: Matthew 14:23; 26:36-45; Mark 14:32-41;  
Luke 6:12, 13; 9:18; 11:1-13.

Devotional Reading: The Lord Prayed for the Apostle  
Peter, Luke 22:31, 32.

## Introduction

We love to call ourselves Christians. By this we mean that we are trying to be like Christ. To be like Him should be the highest ideal. Christ knew the importance of prayer. When Jesus was preparing to select the men who would serve as apostles, Jesus spent the entire night in prayer (Luke 6:12, 13). After prayerful deliberation Jesus chose the twelve to serve. Prayer was so essential to His ministry that His disciples made a request. “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). They had watched Him spend time in prayer and wanted to adopt the practice in their lives.

Prayer has been greatly neglected in modern times. Possibly one of the greatest causes of backsliding is neglecting to pray. This leads a person to depend on self rather than God. When a person prays, it opens the avenues for God’s help to come. When Jesus faced especially difficult days, He went to God in prayer. As the moment of His betrayal and arrest approached, Jesus went out to the Garden of Gethsemane and poured out His soul to the Father (Matt. 26:38, 39, 42).

Jesus was the greatest example of a proper prayer life. The verses of the lesson Text give the prayer offered by Christ prior to His betrayal and arrest. He was with His disciples and wanted to make sure their future was built upon the will of God. His prayer offered the perfect example from the perfect man.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ **The Direction of His Prayer—  
the Father**

While Jesus was on earth, He knew the need of offering prayers to the Heavenly Father. This drew Him into intimate fellowship with the Father. Christ's prayer from the lesson Text shows a conversation between Jesus and the Father. This is the pattern we should follow.

When Jesus prayed to God in Heaven, He lifted up words of praise and worship. One phrase that shows this aspect of His prayer comes from John 17:1, "Thy Son also may glorify thee." Jesus had a thorough understanding of the glory the Father has. In eternity past, Jesus (the Word) dwelt with God and was equal with God (John 1:1). He had seen the infinite glory possessed by God (John 17:5). He wanted to bring additional glory to the Father. This was one reason He directed His prayers toward Heaven.

Daniel was a man of prayer. The time came when the law of the land forbade prayers to anyone other than the king. Daniel opened his window toward Jerusalem and directed his prayers toward God. We will probably not face such times as having prayers outlawed. But there are times when prayer is frowned upon. A recent report from a news agency detailed what it called the antic of touchdown prayers. It was declared unnecessary to give such an evident expression of faith. Prayers can be sent toward God anytime. Our Heavenly Father cares enough to listen when we pray.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ **The Desire of His Prayer—  
His Work**

In His prayer, Jesus spoke of the work He was performing while on earth. His statements did not describe everything He did, but they showed the primary purpose He had in His ministry.

In the prayer Jesus spoke of offering eternal life to the human race. Jesus paid the price for sin. His prayer in the les-

son Text came prior to His death. The prospect of crucifixion could not have been a pleasant thought. Jesus endured what was coming by looking at the end result. We must also consider what Jesus accomplished. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). What was "the joy that was set before him?" He knew the time would come when He would be resurrected and would ascend to sit at the right hand of God. Something else was produced by His sacrifice. His death purchased our salvation (1 Peter 1:18-20). His prayer expressed His desire to give eternal life to those who would believe on Him. This act of redemption would bring glory to the Father (John 17:4).

Jesus also spoke of His work in presenting God's Word to His followers. One reason Christ came to earth was to make known to the human race the love and mercy of God. Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus is the expression of God. He demonstrated the essential character of the Father. Since Jesus was sent from the Father, He could relay God's message to the human race. He had given people God's words and the disciples had received them. God's message had a definite impact on those people. Jesus prayed they would continue to keep His word.

Christ wanted God's will to be accomplished on earth. He desired to fulfill the purpose set for Him in eternity. His prayer later that same night showed how important it was to do God's will. "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). Though He would be required to face horrible torture, Jesus knew it was necessary for Him to shed His blood to pay the price of sin. He wanted all people to have the opportunity to gain eternal life.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **The Determination of His Prayers— His Disciples**

When Jesus offered His prayer, He was in the presence of the disciples. He did not speak these words whimsically or without thought. He wanted to encourage them to live for God. His prayer showed His determination to help them grow spiritually.

The prayer reminded them of His protection (John 17:12). He had “kept” them. This means He stood guard over them. They might have faced days when they thought destruction was soon to come, but Jesus had guarded them from ultimate defeat. The day was soon coming when Jesus would be taken away. They would face the future without His physical presence. Jesus’ prayer covered that future protection as well (verse 15). Satan would continue to attack them. He would seek to “sift you [them] as wheat” (Luke 22:31). If Christ had protected them before, He would protect them again. He would never forsake them (Heb. 13:5).

The prayer also spoke of the importance of God’s Word in life. “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Jesus asked the Father to “sanctify them,” or set them aside for His use. God has a task for every believer. The Lord looked to the apostles to be the early stability of an infant church. They would teach and lead the new believers as they grew in the things of the Lord. That early church at Jerusalem gained a reputation there. Thousands of people were saved, baptized and added to the congregation (Acts 2:41). The men who led the congregation were the apostles. The Lord had set them aside for the specific task of leadership and training. This prayer was for God’s help in bringing them to that stage of growth. The apostles responded and did what they could.

His prayer was not solely for the apostles or other early saints. His prayer was directed toward future believers who would also need God’s help in becoming what they should (John 17:20). God has people today serving in various roles in churches around the world. Jesus wants us to have the same assurance as those disciples. He will hold us secure and protect us against the attacks of Satan. If Satan hated believers and servants of God during biblical days, he hates believers and servants of God today. He will bring “fiery darts” to attack us (Eph. 6:16). God has provided the means to thwart those attacks. We can trust God to help every time Satan comes against us. God has set us aside for specific tasks (sanctify). We can do what God wants because He is willing to help us. Paul understood this great truth. Everything he did was because God was working through him. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh

I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

The Lord still loves His disciples. His prayer offered prior to His death shows He was thinking of all who would trust Him as Savior. What a glorious thought! Jesus cared enough to pray for us when He was facing a tortuous death. He was determined that we not fail. He prayed for God’s help in living for Him.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus was a man of prayer. One would think it unnecessary for Him to be in constant prayer to the Father. But the Son of God felt it essential to spend long hours communicating with the Heavenly Father. He prayed at every point of His life. When matters were difficult, Jesus prayed. When facing important decisions, Jesus prayed. On normal days when things were going fine, Jesus prayed. If Jesus thought prayer to be so important, why do we neglect it so? We do so to our own loss.

Prayer is vital in a life for Christ. It is difficult to know the right way to go when the world is so insistent on tempting us to go its way. It is difficult to choose correctly when all the wrong choices are constantly bombarding us. Jesus showed us the only way to go in the right direction. It comes back to prayer. If we are not in communication with the Father, we will make the wrong choices. Let’s be careful not to neglect the important matter of prayer. Since Jesus is our example to follow, we must devote our hearts to prayer.

## Prayers for the Sick

### APPLICATION

To understand the need to pray for the sick because Christ is the Great Physician.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: James 5:13-20.

Related Scripture: Genesis 20:17, 18; 1 Kings 13:6; 2 Kings 4:33-37; Psalm 34:15; Matthew 17:14-21.

Devotional Reading: Hezekiah's Meaningful Prayer, 2 Kings 20:1-7.

### Introduction

The worship service draws to a close. The pastor stands before the congregation and reads a list of names for whom prayers should be offered. As we hear the names, we notice the vast majority of names mentioned are people who are sick and in need of God's help. Doctors and those who work in health care facilities are a great blessing. Medicine is important in the healing process. But we must remember that all healing comes from the Lord. He is *El Rapha*, "the LORD that healeth" (Ex. 15:26). If any help is to come, it must spring from Him.

There is a sickness that supercedes any physical ailment. It is the sickness of sin. This disease afflicts every person coming into the world. This passage of Scripture which talks about prayer for the sick also shows how vital it is to pray for those who are consumed with sin. These people who are without Christ face a horrible future. Their sin-sickness and their rejection of the Savior will cause them to spend eternity separated

from God. If we have the compassion to pray for those who are physically ill, we should have even greater mercy on those who are sin-sick and separated from God. The lesson Text teaches the importance of praying for those who are sick and afflicted.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ **The Problems Leading to Prayer**

People often neglect to pray until something terrible happens. When a child is injured, when a loved one falls ill, or when facing a difficult choice, then people begin to pray. These are important reasons to come to God, but they should not be the only times.

We should pray for those who are “afflicted” (James 5:13). This is a term with the idea of enduring hardships. The word does not restrict it to those who are physically ill. It can include marital problems, business setbacks or dramatic injury. It is difficult to pray when distracted by the cares of life. The Word of God has difficulty penetrating a mind burdened with “the cares of this world” (Mark 4:19). The afflictions of life can drag a person away from the proper mindset and can cause him or her to slide away from the Lord. Those in affliction deserve our prayers.

Prayers should also be offered for those who are “sick” (James 5:14). This word speaks of the feebleness caused by illness. When a person endures lengthy sickness, the normal strength of the body slips away. It is appropriate for the sick to seek help from doctors. Paul served the Lord with all the strength he possessed. One of his traveling companions was Luke, the physician. Paul even encouraged Timothy to take necessary medicine for an ongoing stomach ailment (1 Tim. 5:23). This would help the young pastor regain his strength. But even when seeking the help of health care professionals, a person should pray for God’s strength to help the medicine and treatments. Those who are sick deserve our prayers.

James mentioned one last matter. In this same context, he spoke of those who are “merry” (James 5:13). This describes a person who is cheerful and full of joy. Those who are happy should also pray. Too many people only pray when difficulties arise. When God answers the prayers for the sick or afflicted, we should quickly return in prayer and thank Him for the many blessings He has poured down upon us. Our joyful prayers and praise should spring from thankful lips.

How should we approach our times of prayer when facing some affliction or illness? These verses give a pattern to follow that promises results.

The person facing the disease or setback should bring the leadership of the church into the time of prayer. This does not mean an individual cannot pray for a specific need. More than one person needs to be praying. There is greater strength when more people join together (Eccl. 4:12). A vehicle stuck in the mud is more easily extracted when help is available. One person's power is limited. Each additional body adds more force. This is also true in matters of prayer. When people agree in prayer, there is greater strength. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:19). A person facing difficulties should call the spiritual leadership of the church together so they can join in prayer. When joint prayer is offered to God, great results will follow.

Another aspect of prayer we sometimes forget is confession of sins. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16). The Scriptures teach that sometimes sickness comes because of rebellion and sin. The church at Corinth faced this problem. Some people in that church participated in the Lord's Supper without understanding the gravity of the service. They were not "discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:29). Because of this failure, some within the congregation had grown physically weak and ill. Some had even died (verse 30). They needed forgiveness so their illness caused by their rebellion could be healed.

The formula continues by teaching prayers should spring from a righteous heart (James 5:16). A heart given to and controlled by sin will have little impact. Isaiah spoke to the Israelites about their immoral behavior. Their unrighteous acts and their sin-filled lives hindered the effectiveness of their prayers. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:2). People expect God to grant their petitions even though they are consumed with sin. God is not obligated to grant our sinful wishes. God expects us to repent of sins so He can forgive them. It is a righteous person who has power with God.

God gave us the proper pattern to follow in bringing our burdens and needs to Him in prayer. Too many people want to follow their own plan, but that will produce nothing. When we do things God's way, He will bring about the needed results.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **The Power of Prayer**

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Prayer done God's way will prevail and accomplish much. But this is a prayer that is "effectual fervent." This means it is a working prayer. Real prayer will not sit on the sidelines and be a spectator. It will be a prayer that produces a change first within us, and then in those around us. If I am praying for God to save a loved one, an effectual, fervent prayer will compel me to share the gospel with them. If I am praying for God to heal someone, I will endeavor to get them the best medical attention available and trust God to produce the results. When we offer prayers God's way, He gives power to those prayers.

James gave an example of this principle. Elijah was a normal human being. He faced days when he panicked over troubles. One time Jezebel threatened his life because of his stand for God. Elijah had just experienced a great victory against false religion. Yet, when this threat came, he ran as fast as he could. He truly was "a man subject to like passions as we are" (verse 17). Yet, he had power with God. To prove God's displeasure over the sins of the people, Elijah prayed that it would not rain. The Jewish people always considered the rains to be a sign of God's blessings on them. If the rain was taken away, then God must be displeased. For three and a half years, not one drop of rain fell on the nation. Crops failed to produce. Rivers and streams dried up. People suffered. Then Elijah prayed for rain. The rain quickly came. This was not coincidental. It was the result of prayer offered by a righteous man.

Someone might say, he was a special man. No, he was "a man subject to like passions as we are" (verse 17). He was not a superman. He was no different than we are. He was willing to trust God and seek His help in all matters. Because he lived for God and wanted His help, his prayers were effective and powerful. He serves as an example of what a normal human being can accomplish when he trusts God.

## Conclusion

What do you do when someone you love faces a terrible illness? It is good and appropriate to bring that heartfelt petition to God. He cares even more than you do. It is our responsibility to pray in the appropriate manner. It must spring from a righteous heart. You should seek the best available medical attention. In the lesson Text, the one who was ill was anointed with oil. This was not some spiritual exercise. It was a medical treatment they believed would help the healing process. While seeking a doctor's help, pray that God will bless the efforts of the physician. Pray that God will cause the medicine to be effective. This kind of fervent prayer will often produce the desired results.

We should also remember those who are spiritually sick. If they are lost, we should pray for their salvation. This will challenge us to go to them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul desired this kind of prayer. "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:3). God will prepare the heart, and we can plant the seed of God's Word. This spiritual affliction is the greatest difficulty anyone can face.

**It's later than you think.**



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# Prayers for Churches

## APPLICATION

To encourage God's people to pray for their sister churches as well as praying for the church of their membership.

## SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Romans 1:8-13.

Related Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Colossians 1:3-8;  
1 Thessalonians 1:2-4; Philemon 1:2, 4-6.

Devotional Reading: The Prayer for the Church at Philippi,  
Philippians 1:3-11.

## Introduction

A great example of missionary outreach was the ministry of Paul. His life was directed toward reaching new communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He would enter a city, preach to the people there, establish a church, confirm them in the Word of God and move on to another community to repeat the process. His letters to churches reveal his heart remained with the congregations he established. He often prayed for churches to have the blessings of God.

There is loneliness in New Testament churches today. They forget the many churches engaged in reaching the world for Jesus Christ. This is one of the benefits of associational gatherings. Like-minded churches gather to encourage and help one another. No church is really alone. The Old Testament tells what happened to Elijah. He had a great victory but was subsequently attacked by the queen. He ran for his life and became depressed. God confronted him for his attitude. "What doest thou here?" (1 Kings 19:9). Elijah responded, "I have been very jealous for the LORD God

of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (verse 10). Elijah thought he was alone. God assured him there were seven thousand people in Israel who had remained faithful to Jehovah. Elijah was encouraged and continued his labors. This is the benefit of knowing other churches are faithfully involved in the work of God.

Every church is in constant need of prayer. The world works hard to distract a church in its mission. Other churches face difficulties we have not experienced. Floods, hurricanes, tornadoes and fire ravage various parts of the country. Churches in those places need our prayerful support. Churches determine to help other communities. They deserve our prayerful support. What are some areas where prayers for sister churches are needed?

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ **Their Testimony**

Paul expressed thankfulness for the church at Rome and its testimony in the world. Its faith was discussed throughout the world. It was in a strategic location for global outreach. Rome was the center of the civilized world. There was a generalized statement, all roads lead to Rome. Everything in the empire revolved around its capital. This vital, effective church was spoken of throughout the kingdom. Paul was thankful the church at Rome had a testimony so far-reaching.

Many churches are engaged in missionary outreach today. The Lord’s Great Commission expresses the duty of every church. Churches are to reach the world with the gospel. Each church can fulfill its duty beginning with the local community. It is often difficult to reach the people who are familiar with you. They see your failures; yet, we must begin reaching people at home (Acts 1:8). Church members can pray that other churches will be successful in reaching people for Christ. These joint prayers are important. Jesus said, “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:19).

Whether a church sees the need to send a missionary to a distant country or local community, it will need the help of a sister church in accomplishing that goal. This help should begin with prayer. When a church is praying for the outreach of a sister church, the work will be more effective. The praying church will

develop a burden for the mission endeavor and will probably begin supporting financially. Church members should pray for the testimony of other churches.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **God's Direction for their Ministry**

Paul wanted to come to the church at Rome and help them by sharing the Word of God. This would benefit the church there and would bless his ministry. But it all had to be according to the will of God. Paul prayed that God would direct his steps to Rome so he could minister to that church. His prayer was answered, but not as he expected. Paul had traveled in freedom to many places in the Roman empire. This time God would provide free passage to Rome by making him a prisoner. He was taken to the capital city where he was given the opportunity of ministry in his own house for at least two years. God answered that prayer.

Does God still direct the steps of His people? The problem is not with God. He is still the God of the universe. The problem is with us. Paul diligently prayed for God to direct his steps to Rome. He had a burden for the people there and wanted to strengthen them. He was specific in his prayer. Too many people only offer generic prayers to God. They have no burden for ministry so they never ask God's help for anything. They just float through life and wonder why they have no opportunities for service. It could simply be they have never desired to serve enough to pray about it. If God answered Paul's prayer, He will answer ours as well. We must pray for God to direct our steps.

Each church has a unique field of labor, but each church has the task of reaching people. Every church needs God's help and direction. Paul prayed for the church meeting at Philemon's house that their outreach would become effective (Phm. 6). We can pray for God to direct the steps of sister churches in their endeavors.

## 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Their Confirmation in the Faith**

Paul spoke of the faith held mutually by him and the church at Rome. This is "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Knowing the church at Rome tenaciously held to the truth brought comfort to the heart of Paul. He was thankful for their doctrinal purity. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth desiring them to be "confirmed" (1 Cor. 1:6) in the testimony of Christ. This word means "being made stable or firm." The truth does not

change from generation to generation. It does not waver from place to place. It is steadfast and sure. Paul wanted the churches of His day to be firm in standing for the truth.

Each church should pray for its teaching ministry to develop members who will stand for truth. This is fulfilled when a church is careful in selecting its teaching staff and helping its teachers with the best materials available. These materials must be Bible-based and sound. Every church should pray for the writers and editors of this material that they will produce teaching material to bless churches. Then they should pray for the teachers as they present the lessons. Even good lesson material must be presented in a manner that will reach the mind and heart. Each church should also pray for those who attend classes so their hearts will be open to the message presented. These prayers play an important part in confirming a church in the faith.

We should also pray for other churches. The world is full of wrong ideas presented under the guise of scriptural teaching. They come dressed as sheep but inwardly are “ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Recently one famous television preacher proclaimed to be America’s pastor declared he saw no basic difference between Christianity and the Mormon religion. We should pray for sister churches so these churches will not fall prey to such vile heresy. Pray for God to confirm churches in “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

## **Conclusion**

All churches need prayers. This means you should pray for the church of your membership. Pray God will strengthen it in outreach, ministry and truth. Every member of a church should be concerned about his church’s relationship with God. Prayer will place a burden on our hearts so we will endeavor to make our church the best it can be.

Other churches also need your prayers. A nearby sister church might face a decision which might take it in the wrong direction. We should pray for God to burden the leadership of a church to bring it back toward the truth. We should pray for the outreach of every church so more people will be saved. We have an awesome responsibility. Will you accept the task of praying for churches?

# Prayers for Leaders

## APPLICATION

To encourage God's people to pray for leaders in government as well as for spiritual leaders.

## SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 1 Timothy 2:1, 2.

Related Scripture: Jeremiah 29:7; Romans 13:1-7; 15:30; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Philippians 1:19; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-16.

Devotional Reading: A Prayer for a King, Ezra 6:10.

## Introduction

The political scene is a vital part of the American scene. People run for political office with the intent of taking the country in a certain direction. Christians should become interested and involved in matters of government. Government is not a product of the human intellect. It is ordained by God and serves His purpose (Rom. 13:1). This does not mean every official will be a godly person or his choice will always be correct. The frailty of human flesh should encourage us to pray even more for those in positions of leadership.

Bible characters often understood the importance of those in authority. Ezra desired to return to Jerusalem and bring the people back to God. In preparation for his journey, he prayed for God's help and enlisted the support of the government (Ezra 7:11). He had the cooperation of the king in performing the work of God. Nehemiah faced a similar dilemma. He had a bur-

den to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. He prayed to God to open the heart of the king to aid in this awesome task (Neh. 2:5).

Paul taught Timothy about prayer. Prayer should be made for all people. Christians should have such concern for all people that our prayers are constantly lifted up on their behalf. Paul's lesson was more than a general demand to pray for all people. He specified certain ones who needed our prayers. They included people who are in positions of leadership. We often take his statement as applying solely to those who are leaders in government. It also included those in positions of spiritual leadership. God's people need to pray for those in leadership of our nation and our churches.

### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ **Prayer for Governmental Leaders**

Many people think praying for governmental officials is unnecessary. They reason something like this. The person I voted for was not elected as president, senator, governor or representative. Since my person is not in office, why should I pray for him or her? The reason is simple. God commanded us to pray for them. It is a responsibility.

Governmental officials make decisions that impact everyone's lives. When the legislators make a law and the president signs it into effect, it has a bearing on how we live. This was God's purpose in government. He ordained the work of governments (Rom. 13:1). He even determines the extent and duration of kingdoms (Acts 17:26). Every government operates under the watchful eye of God. This causes a little anxiety in the hearts of some people. How could God allow ungodly governments to flourish? They are often His tool to bring judgment to people. The Babylonian empire was ruthless and cruel; yet, God chose them to be the tool to bring chastisement on the people of Israel. They were His sword to exercise discipline. The Lord told the Israelites to pray for the king who had captured them. "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it" (Jer. 29:7). We must view government as a tool from His hand (Rom. 13:4). This does not mean every action by a government is good, holy or righteous. It simply means governments are put into existence for

God's ultimate purpose. He will use them to accomplish His eternal goal.

What should be the reaction when the government passes some law we find morally or spiritually offensive? We should constantly be watchful as the legislators consider bills that will impact our Christian walk. When something arises that will restrict our rights, we should quickly take the matter to God in prayer. As He directs, we have every solemn right, even the responsibility, to influence the legislators toward making proper decisions. Our prayers and our careful, spiritual influence can help mold the nation into what God wants it to be.

What if the government passes a law that challenges our work of reaching out with the gospel of Jesus Christ? The early church at Jerusalem faced this issue. The Sanhedrin Council issued an edict for the apostles not to speak anymore about the name of Jesus (Acts 4:16-18). Peter and the others continued preaching Jesus as the Christ. When arrested and threatened again, they responded, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). They knew they would face the consequences of disobeying man's law, but God's law held a higher priority. They would obey God no matter what might come.

Since the potential for trouble is so great, God's people must carefully and tirelessly pray for those who hold leadership positions in the government. They need help in making godly decisions. They need help in dispensing justice. The prayers we lift before the throne of grace can influence them into doing the right thing.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Prayer for Spiritual Leaders**

While the pastor of a church might not have influence over as many people as the government does, his influence is of greater value. He seeks to lead toward spiritual truth and commitment to God. This is of eternal value. The government will impact our physical lives, but pastoral leadership will influence the eternal. The pastor and other leaders within a church need your prayers.

In many of Paul's letters he encouraged people to pray for him. The writer of Hebrews directed his readers to hold those in spiritual leadership in high regard. They were to "remember them which have the rule over you" (Heb. 13:7), obey them

(verse 17) and salute them (verse 24). These terms reflect a positive attitude toward the pastor. *Remember* means “recalling and rehearsing his ministry.” Too many people forget the many hours and diligent labor of the pastor. *Obey* means “to assent to the authority and rely on his guidance.” The pastor spends much time praying for the direction of a church. A church should rely upon his biblical leadership. *Salute* has the idea of welcoming. Its root has the idea of enfolding in the arms. A church should embrace its pastor in loving arms.

There are reasons why this high regard should be extended toward the pastor. He has the responsibility of preaching and teaching the Word of God. This is one of the primary tasks of the pastor (Acts 6:4). The prayers of church members can help him in directing the teaching ministry as God leads. So pray as he studies the Bible and prepares his sermons. It will be to your benefit. He also has the responsibility of watching over the souls of the congregation (Heb. 13:17). He is accountable for every person in the congregation. He will give a report to God for the church. He should do it with joy and not sorrow. Is your pastor grieving over the condition of the church? Lift him up to the throne of grace.

So, how can you pray for your pastor? You can consider his needs—ministry, family and personal needs. You might not know all he is facing, but by watching his demeanor, you can have a better understanding of his burdens. Be empathetic toward his needs and pray about them. If you see his vehicle is wearing out, it might indicate his finances are tight. If he has the air of sadness, it could be he is facing a burden beyond your imagination. While he probably will not share the depth of the burden, you can still lift him up in prayer. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Pray for your pastor even when everything appears to be going fine. He has needs he never reveals. He is your spiritual leader and deserves your prayerful support.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **The Reason for These Prayers**

Prayers for those in positions of leadership, both government and spiritual, are vital for the well-being of the public. Good decisions by those who make and administer the laws can help

life be more peaceful (1 Tim. 2:2). This has a positive impact on the lives of God's people.

When the government operates the way God intends, people have the freedom to live and worship as God intended. Possibly this is one of the reasons God has so blessed the United States of America during the years of its history. It was founded on the principle that all people had certain rights given by their Creator. Even the Constitution allows the right of every individual to worship as he sees fit. Nothing should ever abolish that right; yet, recently it has become popular to try and limit the application of one's religious convictions to governmental decisions. To declare abortion wrong because life begins at conception is considered by some to be forcing one's religious opinions on others. This is a matter of morality. It is wrong to take life, and the unborn child is fully alive. Such matters as this are vital for our nation if we hope to retain the blessings of God. This must be a matter of prayer for God's people. We want our legislators to make right decisions concerning matters of right and wrong. The only way this will happen is if God's people pray for governmental officials and seek to elect officials who mirror our understanding of right and wrong.

## **Conclusion**

When was the last time you prayed for someone in a position of leadership? It might be someone who holds a governmental office—the president, your legislators, the governor, the mayor or the city council. It might be your pastor, music leader or Sunday School teacher. These are all people who deserve your prayers. It is more than just a matter of God's command for our lives. It is practical as well. We want life to be peaceable and happy. We want our church to grow. These things can happen, but they begin as we bow in humble prayer to the Lord. We have the responsibility. Will we do what we should?

# Prayers for Enemies

## APPLICATION

To encourage the child of God to pray for his enemies.

## SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Matthew 5:43-48.

Related Scripture: Numbers 12:1-13; 13:11-19; Psalms 13; 27:1-4; Acts 7:60; Romans 12:14, 20, 21; 2 Timothy 4:16.

Devotional Reading: Father, Forgive Them, Luke 23:32-34.

## Introduction

One of the most overwhelming emotions we can experience is anger. When someone harms us, it is natural to harbor anger. You might have done nothing to deserve such treatment. You could have been close friends with the individual; yet, they hurt you physically or emotionally. What should you do in such a circumstance?

David is a familiar biblical character. He was set aside at an early age to be the next king. Later, he faithfully served the nation of Israel and its king. When the Philistine champion, Goliath, challenged the armies of Israel, it was David who stood against him. He fought by the power of God and gained the victory. King Saul appointed David as the leader of the armies of Israel. He led them into battle and triumphed over their enemies. But Saul was unhappy with his success. He perceived him as a threat. He pursued David and tried to kill him. David remained true to God and his king. God gave David at least two opportunities to kill King Saul, but he refused to do so. His attitude toward his enemy shows the right way to handle such situations.

This attitude is difficult to implement in our lives. Jesus spoke to His disciples about forgiveness. He told them to be forgiving when someone wronged them and then repented of his wrong. If this happened seven times in a day, they were to forgive him seven times (Luke 17:3, 4). In amazement they made a request of Jesus, “Lord, Increase our faith” (verse 5). They needed God’s help to accomplish it. Nothing is different for us. To forgive is not easy, but it is right. Jesus said, “Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you” (Luke 6:28). We need to learn how to pray for our enemies.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

**The Attitude—Love**

Love is the highest emotion a person can experience. The New Testament has different words to express varying ideas of love. One is *phileo*. It has the idea of affection and friendship. It is good but does not express the highest ideals of love. The word used in the lesson Text is *agape*. It is the highest word for love. It is used to express God’s love for His Son and the human race. It also describes the attitude people need to have toward God. It is a deeply felt love that exceeds all other things. This kind of love goes beyond mere emotional attachment. It is a decision of the mind to hold something in the highest regard. It is a choice.

Jesus is the greatest example of love for one’s enemy. His coming to earth as the sacrifice for sin is the ultimate expression of love. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6-8). Though we were His enemies (verse 10), He was willing to reconcile us to God through His own death. Jesus said man’s greatest expression of love would be to die for his friends (John 15:13). Jesus was willing to die on the cross so that every person would have the opportunity to be saved. This is true love.

With this example before us, we should be challenged to step beyond our personal bitterness. If God could love us enough to give His only begotten Son, we can have love for those who have harmed us. How can we do this? “Lord, Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5).

Love is an emotion that must be expressed in action. Too many people think the ultimate expression of love is to say the words. The apostle John wrote, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). A person can say anything. Showing love is far better than merely speaking the words. Love is demonstrated by actions. Jesus gave three things that demonstrate love.

“Bless them that curse you” (Matt. 5:44). This term has the idea of speaking well of someone. This is like the old saying, “If you can’t say something good about someone, don’t say anything at all.” God wants our words to be positive and uplifting. This does not mean we make something up so we can speak well of someone. That would be lying. Instead, if we do not have something positive to say about someone, we should not speak. What is the benefit of such action? When we are able to “Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not” (Rom. 12:14), we are showing the mind of Christ. It might be easier to lash out in anger toward an enemy, but we need the attitude of love.

“Do good to them that hate you” (Matt. 5:44). When someone hurts you, how do you respond? When they have harmed us, we want to strike back. That is the wrong thing. “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:20, 21). We are not to do good so the coals of fire will fall on them. Our attitude of love and forgiveness, when genuine, will be the fire of conviction in their hearts.

“Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). The two previous actions toward our enemies are outward. This action is more internal. People can see when we speak well of those who have harmed us. When it comes to prayer, no one knows what is in your heart. When we bring this person to the throne of grace and ask God to bless him and help him do right, we are expressing the innermost feelings of the heart. We can speak well of people and do good things for them and still harbor resentment in our hearts. It is difficult to pray for someone and continue hating him. This kind of prayer will

change your heart and will impact the life of your enemies. We must pray for those who are hurting us.

Having the right attitude will produce right actions in life. This is why we received the admonition from the apostle John not just to talk about love. We must express it in action. People will always watch how you conduct yourself. They need to see a loving and forgiving heart. You should pray for your enemies.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

### **The Aim— Our Testimony**

When we seek the attitude of love for enemies, at what are we aiming? There are definite reasons this is a positive thing to do.

Praying for our enemies is an evidence of our testimony for Christ. Anyone can claim to believe the Lord. Anyone can claim they are followers of Christ. To really prove one's relationship with Christ takes action. So, when we are able to love those who have wrongfully treated us, we demonstrate God's love within our hearts. God brings good upon all people. He makes the sun to rise and rain to fall on all people whether good or bad. His gifts are expressions of His love for all humanity. If we have experienced that love, we must extend it toward others. We must be open and loving to all people, even those who have harmed us.

How is this expressed in practical terms? If we do good things only for those who have treated us well, what have we accomplished? "Do not even the publicans the same?" (Matt. 5:46). It is easy to love people who show you love. It is not easy to love those who hate you. God enables us to behave differently than those in the world. We can love our enemies. This simple act will enhance our testimony for Christ.

Having a testimony that shows the love of God in every action demonstrates the growth of the individual. Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (verse 48). This word *perfect* has the idea of completeness or maturity. It does not mean the individual is without sin. The only one who could claim that would be Jesus Christ (1 John 3:5). *To be perfect* means "we have grown in our understanding of Christ and want to follow Him completely." When a person can look at his or her enemies with compassion and concern, when that indi-

vidual only wants what is best for those who oppose him or her, that person is mature and complete. Christ has done a great work in that life. This should be the goal of every child of God.

## **Conclusion**

What is your attitude toward those who try to bring harm to you or your family? The natural thing to feel is anger, resentment and hatred. We need to grow in our relationship with Christ to the point where we can respond as He did. The Jewish leaders arrested Christ and illegally tried Him. They sentenced Him to death and brought Him before the Roman governor for execution. As Jesus hung on the cross in deepest agony, His thoughts were not on Himself. He was thinking about those around Him. He cried out, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). He looked upon those around Him with love and compassion and prayed for them.

What a great challenge we face! *To do the right thing* means "we will release our bitterness toward others and will ask God to bless them." We will try to bring good into their lives. Will you show God's work in your life by praying for your enemies?

# Prayer Postures or Positions

## APPLICATION

To encourage prayer regularly rather than the position one chooses.

## SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 2 Kings 20:2; Mark 11:25; Luke 22:41.

Related Scripture: Numbers 16:22; Joshua 5:15; 2 Chronicles 6:13; Psalms 5:3; 95:6; Isaiah 1:15; Lamentations 3:41; Ephesians 3:14; 1 Timothy 2:8.

Devotional Reading: Solomon Stood To Pray, 1 Kings 8:22.

## Introduction

What position should you be in when praying? Biblically, this seems to be a matter of preference. The Word of God gives examples of people praying in different positions. What is far more important than the bodily posture is the condition of one's heart. The position of the body will often be a reflection of what is in the heart. If a person is broken in spirit, it is likely he or she will be kneeling before God in prayer. If a person is rejoicing, he or she might lift the head and hands toward God in thankfulness. When in a public place, a person might stand while leading the congregation in prayer. It is not the position that is so important. It is the communication with God.

What takes place during a prayer? When a person begins communicating with God, it is like pouring out the heart to Him (Psalm 62:8). The innermost thoughts are laid bare before the all-knowing God. This is like lifting up one's soul before the Lord (Psalm 25:1). This will cause us to draw near to His pres-

ence (Psalm 73:28). We should desire to draw as near to Him as possible. As we seek His face, we find our will bending to His. This should be the goal of all our prayers whether we are standing, kneeling or however we might pray positionally.

This lesson will focus on some examples of varying postures of prayer. We will examine what led up to that kind of prayer and seek to see the heart of the individuals. We should not focus on having a certain position but simply opening up to our God.

## 1. \_\_\_\_\_ **Praying While Facing a Wall**

Hezekiah was the king of Israel. God said “he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did” (2 Kings 18:3). Hezekiah faced a terrible illness. If something did not happen, he would soon die. The prophet Isaiah came to him with a message from God. “Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). Such a message was bound to bring distress to his heart and mind. He was on his bed when the message came. As Isaiah departed, Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall and offered a heartfelt prayer to God (verse 3). God heard and answered the prayer offered on a bed with his face toward the wall.

Times come in life when an individual has no strength to change positions. How can that person pray? There is no need to come down off the bed. There is no need to assume some prayerful posture. Right where a person is, prayer can be lifted into the presence of the Lord.

A certain woman had become almost fully paralyzed. She could not lift her head, much less lift her hands. She spent her entire day on her bed. If she had to assume a certain position to pray, she could never pray. Yet, that woman, confined to her bed was a great prayer warrior for her church and pastor. She had the ear of God even while on her bed.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Praying While Standing**

Jesus often taught His disciples on the subject of prayer. One time He said, “When ye stand praying” (Mark 11:25). He continued to instruct them concerning the attitude of prayer. One might ask why He specified standing while praying. This could have something to do with the traditions of the people of His day. There were certain times for prayer during the day. When

the trumpet sounded from the Temple, people were to pray. Everyone knew as the time for prayer approached. Some would make sure they were on a busy street corner so everyone could see them. They would stand in the midst of great crowds speaking great flowing words. Jesus did not commend such wordy, unfeeling prayers (Matt. 6:5). However, the Lord did not condemn standing while praying. When praying in a congregational setting, standing is a good thing. For all to hear what is said, the one praying should stand to project one's voice. Then others can agree with the prayer offered to God.

We need to notice the intent of what Jesus said. Even when they were standing during their prayers, their focus was on the proper attitude of love and forgiveness. Our prayers need to have the proper attitude without regard to whether or not we are standing.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Praying While Kneeling**

When Jesus neared the time of His betrayal and arrest, He spent time on His knees in prayer. He and the disciples went out to the Mount of Olives to a garden where He was accustomed to praying. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus separated Himself from the disciples and knelt before the Father in prayer. He was facing His most difficult time. He would soon be tortured and hung on a cross. He would not face this agony because of anything He deserved. He would die for the sin of the world. Facing that prospect, Jesus knelt in prayer for God's strength in the upcoming trial. "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Is it appropriate for people today to kneel in prayer? This is a sign of humility. We know God is infinitely above us. We are not even worthy to be in His presence. So, as we seek His face and come before the throne of grace, it is fitting for us to show reverence toward the holy God.

There are times when it almost seems necessary to come before Him while kneeling. When we have bitterly failed Him, when our world appears to be falling apart, how else can we come to God? At times like this, it is even difficult to express our deepest emotions. When we bow before Him, it is an expression of our desires. The Holy Spirit will work with our feeble prayers in an act of bringing our petitions before God (Rom. 8:26). It is right to approach Him humbly.

#### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ **Praying While Lifting the Hands**

Even before Solomon ascended to the throne, he was ordained to build a house of worship for the Lord. The Temple was a magnificent structure that showed the magnificence of God. Solomon spared no expense in building the most beautiful sanctuary possible. When the workers ended the task of erecting the Temple, Solomon dedicated it to God. He offered innumerable sacrifices in praise to the Lord (1 Kings 8:5). Solomon stood before the altar of sacrifice to worship. He “spread forth his hands toward heaven” and began his prayer (verse 22). On this glorious occasion, when God had been so gracious to the king and his people, Solomon felt it appropriate to extend his hands upward expressing his desire to draw nearer to God. It was not some flashy show intended to draw attention to himself. Instead, it was a simple expression of love and gratitude to God because of His gracious goodness. It was an outward expression of inner joy.

### **Conclusion**

In examining these various examples of prayer in various positions, we have seen God’s people praying in a manner that drew them nearer to the Lord. It is not that one’s position makes a person better suited to approach God. The posture used will often change with the circumstances. Humility might make a person fall to his face, lying prostrate before the God of the universe. Joshua prayed this way (Joshua 5:14). Joy and satisfaction might cause a person to pray while looking toward the heavens with eyes wide open. David prayed this way (Psalm 5:3). Paul even encouraged people everywhere to pray while extending the hands toward God (1 Tim. 2:8). The way you hold your body will not make your prayers have greater or less impact with God. It comes down to your attitude and heart. Do you desire God’s will to be done in your life? Are you seeking to find His purpose for your life? Such questions as these are far more important than whether you are standing, kneeling, looking up or bowing the head. We must be regular and diligent in our prayers.

# Private Prayers

## APPLICATION

To encourage the child of God to develop a personal devotional life in private prayer and meditation.

## SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Matthew 6:6.

Related Scripture: Job 22:27; Psalm 88:1, 2; Daniel 6:10; Matthew 14:23; Luke 9:18; Acts 9:11; Hebrews 4:15, 16.

Devotional Reading: David's Personal Times To Pray, Psalm 55:17.

## Introduction

Of what does your prayer life consist? Are your prayers offered only when you go to the house of God? Do you only lift your voice to the Lord when sitting at the dinner table? While these are valid times to pray, one's petitions before the Father should not be limited only to these times. There must be times in every person's life dedicated to talking with the Heavenly Father.

What this comes down to is, what do you really think of prayer? If it is only something used to fill time in a worship service of a church, then your attitude toward prayer is not what it should be. If it is only used when great tragedy has struck, then your prayer life needs improvement. Your times of prayer should lift you into the presence of the Lord. It is a time when you can talk to the One who gave you eternal life. Your prayer life is a reflection of your true feelings toward God.

It is vital for every believer to study the Word of God. Such study is equivalent to God talking to you. Without Bible study,

a person cannot know God's will for his or her life. The other aspect of one's devotional life is prayer. It is the other side of the conversation. Bible study is God talking with you. Prayer is you talking with God. There are times when this conversation must be private. Private prayer is the most intimate time a person can spend with God. Those who talk with God privately will have times of close fellowship with God.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ **Example—Jesus**

Jesus always serves as our greatest example in spiritual matters. He was faithful and frequent in His times of private prayer.

Jesus spent time alone in prayer when things were good. On one occasion, Jesus ministered to a great multitude. The day soon drew to a close, and Jesus wanted to feed the people before they departed to go home. The disciples had no food except a lunch packed by a young boy. Jesus took the five loaves and two fishes and blessed them. From that meager fare, Jesus provided enough food to feed five thousand men besides the women and children who were there (Matt. 14:13-21). As the people left, Jesus instructed the disciples to get in the boat and go to the other side of the lake. When Jesus was alone, He went up a mountainside to be alone and pray. He wanted that quiet time alone to commune with the Father.

Often, when things are good, we tend to forget our time alone with God. There are no outstanding requests to make of Him so we just neglect to pray. It is during the good times when we are most vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. We need to be diligent in our communication with God. It wields the shield of faith against the fiery darts of the wicked one. We should pray even when times are good.

Jesus spent time alone in prayer prior to teaching important lessons to the disciples. After a time of solitary prayer, Jesus asked them a question. "Whom say the people that I am?" (Luke 9:18). The people considered Him to be someone great like John the Baptist, Elijah or another of the great prophets. Jesus asked who the disciples thought He was. Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus followed that declaration by teaching the disciples about His com-

ing death and resurrection (Luke 9:22). They needed to be prepared for what was ahead. Jesus had prayed for God's guidance in speaking the right words.

When given the opportunity to teach others about the goodness of God, we need to consider prayerfully what to say. Too often a teacher will stand before a class with a cavalier attitude. There was little study and even less prayer. Teaching a class or preaching to a congregation is an awesome task. It has eternal consequences. To approach such an opportunity without a cloak of prayer is unwise. We should ask God's help both in preparation through study and in presentation through teaching.

Jesus also spent time alone in prayer before making important decisions. The time came for Jesus to set aside twelve men to serve in a special office. These apostles would serve as leaders of the church after Jesus ascended to the Father. The proper choice was vital for the growth of the church. Prior to naming these men, Jesus went up a mountain alone to pray. This was not just a momentary prayer. He spent all night talking to the Father (Luke 6:12). The next morning, after those many hours of prayer, Jesus named His apostles who would lead that early church.

Times of decision are often frightening. We wonder which would be the proper choice. This is why prayer is so important when facing a decision. We should pray until we are confident in the choice. Anything less will invite disaster. God will help us do the right thing.

Jesus' example can help us learn. There is no one better equipped to teach us than Jesus Christ. We should follow His example and engage in times of private prayer.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Expression—Worship and Request**

What benefit can be gained through times of private prayer? It is a time when the individual opens one's heart to God. When with others, it is sometimes difficult to open fully one's heart to God. It is needful to enter times of private prayer to discuss these intimate matters with God.

Prayer is a time of worship. The psalmist David often wrote his prayers as psalms for the benefit of others. He exalted God

above all others. "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:9). The majesty and greatness of God fills the earth and overflows into the heavens. "I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works" (Psalm 9:1). Everything about God is glorious and should be praised. Our private prayers allow us to open our minds to the greatness of God and enable us to speak those words of praise. If we practice honoring Him through our private prayers, we will soon be encouraged to do so publicly as well.

Prayer is also a time of request. Some requests can only be brought to God in a private setting. Personal confession of sin should be offered to God alone. He forgives our sins. This does not mean offences against a church should not be confessed publicly to a church. When we have brought a reproach against a church, we are obligated to confess that act so the church members can forgive and restore (Gal. 6:1). Before any public confession is made, an individual should make it right with God. This is one area needed in our times of private communication with God. Also, there might be a special burden on your heart. It is something important to you, but you do not feel comfortable expressing it to a class or congregation. The burden can be taken directly to the Lord. Your requests do not fall on deaf ears with God. He is listening for your prayers even now.

When entering a time of private prayer, you should do so with a heart of worship. He is the God of the universe; yet, He consents to hear when you call upon Him. His willingness to listen should encourage us to worship Him even more. Our prayers can become offerings of praise to the holy God.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Expectation—Answer**

The Lord made the promise, "thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:6). When we honestly and fervently pray, God has promised to answer our prayers.

Sometimes those answers are exactly what we requested. There are times when we pray for a particular result and get the answer. This happens sometimes when we pray for someone facing injury or illness. I have seen occasions when a dramatic illness struck someone. The doctors saw no way for recovery.

Yet, because of prayers offered by God's people, He granted a cure for that disease. No one can explain it, but God can give the answer we request.

Sometimes His answers are different than what we requested. When we pray for something, we are convinced it is the best thing. Often that is not true. A person prayed diligently and fervently for a particular matter to be. He felt in his heart it was the right thing to happen. He wanted God's will and was convinced this must be God's will. God's answer was far different than what was expected. The person was devastated for a time. But soon he came to realize it was not God's will for that thing to happen. It would have brought sorrow. God gave the proper answer but it was not what was requested.

Sometimes God's answers are, "No." All loving parents have to learn the art of telling the children, "No." Not everything they want is good for them. God is our Heavenly Father. Sometimes He will answer our prayers with a refusal. When that comes, we should try to accept it and seek to know God's will. When God refuses a request, it is for our good.

## **Conclusion**

Private prayer is a vital part of the Christian walk. To think of serving God without talking to Him is unthinkable. We must constantly approach our commander and ask Him to direct our steps. He is never too busy to be approached. We have this marvelous privilege but sometimes neglect it. Use your times of private devotion to approach the throne of grace. You can offer Him the worship He is due. You can bring your petitions before Him. He gives "grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

## Public Prayers

### APPLICATION

Public prayer declares one's faith in God as an open testimony.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Related Scripture: Joshua 7:6-9; 1 Kings 8:22-30; Isaiah 56:7; Matthew 18:19; 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 18:10-14; Acts 10:2; 12:5; 1 Corinthians 11:4, 5.

Devotional Reading: The Priests and Levites Pray in Public, Nehemiah 9.

### Introduction

A certain elderly lady sat on the second pew on the right. She was there every service without fail. The pastor called on her to pray and she began praying. As she prayed, no one questioned whether that dear saint had the ear of God. Her manner of life, even the way she spoke gave evidence of constant communication with God. The words were not flowery. Her delivery was subdued and quiet, but she had the attention of the Almighty. Another person would receive the same invitation to lead in prayer. It sounded like a practiced speech. Yet, there was not the same presence as when the dear lady prayed. What was the difference? They were both public prayers, so that was not the difference. What made one prayer more powerful was the heart of the one praying.

Throughout the Bible are examples of people offering prayers in a public place. These were saints who approached the throne of grace and wanted to bring others along with them. It was not a show or performance. It was genuine communication with God.

When Solomon had completed the Temple and dedicated it to the Lord, he offered a prayer of praise to God. It was not one hidden in his bedchamber. It was lifted up to God in the presence of the congregation. His was a prayer begging God to keep His attention on the Temple as people brought their petitions to Him. God offered the words of the lesson Text as advice on how to have powerful prayers.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Pray Publicly**

God wants His people to eagerly lift their prayers to Him. “If my people, which are called by my name” shall pray (2 Chron. 7:14). Since the Lord was speaking directly to Solomon and the people of Israel, one might assume this instruction on prayer might be limited to them. “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11). The early meaning was for the people of Israel to follow these directions. The application of this verse comes to every generation of believers since that day. Now we are God’s people called by His name. We are to have times of public worship and prayer as Solomon and the people of Israel did.

The Lord gave us an admonition concerning public or joint prayers. “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:19). We might be a small group or large, but public prayers have a marvelous purpose. When we join together in praying for something specific, we have greater assurance than in praying alone. Praying publicly enlists the help of others in seeking the answer to our prayers.

2. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Pray Humbly**

This is the age of pride. Most people look out only for themselves. This attitude of pride contradicts everything God wants from His people. If a person has pride, God will resist him (James 4:6). Pride causes a person to think only of self. This will never bring true, godly success to life. Instead, Solomon said, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18).

Powerful prayers must be offered in humility. This word *humility* means “bowing the knee before someone.” The picture is coming before a king and bowing in respect to his position. Pride refuses to bow. Humility brings a person to the knee. We are not coming before any person in our prayers. We come into the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe. We can only approach Him in humbleness.

Coming to God humbly means we pray for His will to be accomplished. Pride demands our wants and wishes. Pride keeps us from having a proper view of God. He is immeasurably above us. His will is for our good. We can humbly trust His love for us.

## 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Pray Seeking God's Face**

What does it mean to seek the face of God? This phrase was used several times in the Old Testament presenting the idea of seeking the favor of God. We seek the face of God to know more about Him and understand how He feels about us. A child peers into the loving face of his mother to see her smile of approval and love. The children of God seek His face to search out the depths of His love. Paul wrote about the great dimensions of God's love and our needed desire to comprehend it. We “may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:18, 19). His love might be infinitely above us, but we can study and search to understand it better.

Seeking the face of God also implies the desire to know His purpose and will for our lives. Too many people go through life muddling along. They do not really know what God wants from them and are not too anxious to find out. They want to be left alone. When we seek His face, we desire to know Him so intimately that we will live by His purpose. What He wants becomes what we want. Seeking His face means we stop searching for the answers to our desires. His purpose becomes supreme. So the question should arise in our hearts. Am I seeking the face of God? Do I really want to know more about Him? The Lord promised, “Those that seek me early shall find me” (Prov. 8:17).

## 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **Pray Confessing**

This is one aspect of prayer most people tend to forget. Confession of sin is an admission we have committed sin. People

favor being thought of as good and righteous rather than sinful. Scriptures clearly teach the fact of natural sin. "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). Not even one person has the right to claim sinless perfection. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (verse 23). Whether a person is willing to admit sin and confess it to the Lord is a matter of fact.

The Bible also teaches unconfessed sin is a hindrance to our prayers. "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:1, 2). This is also why James taught it was the fervent prayer of a "righteous man" that accomplishes much (James 5:16). As long as a person refuses to confess sin, prayers will not have power.

The Lord admonished Solomon and the people of Israel to "turn from their wicked ways" (2 Chron. 7:14). The purpose of this demand was for their sins to be forgiven. In this manner they will draw nearer to the Lord and will seek to accomplish His will. Then their prayers will be in line with what the Father wants.

The people of Israel often faced times of rebellion against the Lord. Near the end of their wilderness journey, they attacked the city of Jericho. God instructed them to destroy everything in the city. They could take no gold nor anything else. Achan saw some gold, silver and an attractive garment. He took them even though God had forbidden it. This brought a reproach on the nation. Joshua and the elders of Israel went to God in prayer. They confessed the sin of the people and asked God to forgive them. When the sin was forgiven, they were empowered to continue their conquest of the land of promise. God's people need to learn the value of confession and forgiveness of sin.

#### 4. \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Pray Expecting**

A woman has a particular burden. She prays that God will grant the request. She is diligent in her prayer. Though she prays, the request is not granted. Her reaction is, "Well, I didn't really believe it would happen!" This was a prayer offered without really expecting God's answer. Far too many prayers are presented to God in this attitude of unbelief. He will never grant such a request.

The Lord's promise is sure, "Then will I hear from heaven" (2 Chron. 7:14). Jesus said, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22). God has the ability to grant any request. God promised Abraham and Sarah they would have a child. He was almost one hundred and she was almost ninety years old. This was an impossible thing. The mere thought brought laughter to Sarah's lips. God's response was, "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:14). At the appropriate time, Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah. God had kept His word.

All our prayers should be with expectation. This is a matter of trust. Is God trustworthy? He will never break one of His promises (2 Peter 3:9). We can trust Him to answer our prayers.

## **Conclusion**

Not too long after the ascension of the Lord, Peter was arrested and placed in a prison. James, the brother of John, had already been killed by Herod. That act had pleased the Jewish leaders. Herod stretched out his hand against Peter. He faced the same future as James. The church in Jerusalem gathered to pray for him. This prayer was ongoing. The people had deep concern about the safety of one of their pastors. Their prayers in that public setting had great results. God sent an angel to release Peter from the prison.

God still expects His churches to engage in faithful and continuous prayer. There are many needs in the world around us. We must lift them into the presence of the Lord. He is faithful and will hear our prayers. We must be churches and individuals of prayer.