

Sunday, January 14, 2024 am

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY! (1)

Luke 11:1

The gospel of Luke has many distinctive qualities. It is the gospel written to Gentiles, gives attention to historical documentation, shows the compassion Jesus had for the outcasts of society (Samaritans, the poor, etc.), gives greater emphasis to how Jesus interacted with women, and other details.

One of the qualities that stands out in this gospel is its emphasis on prayer. Only Luke's gospel records that at His baptism, Jesus prayed (Luke 3:21-22), that He prayed all night before choosing His apostles (Luke 6:12), that He prayed for Peter when he let him know he would deny Him 3 times (Luke 22:31-32); on the cross as He prays for the Father to forgive them... (Luke 23:34). Luke also records 3 parables about prayer that are not found in the other gospels (Luke 11:5-10, 18:1-8, 9-14 – the Pharisee and tax collector). The 1st of these 3 parables was a response to His disciples, *Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."* (Luke 11:1)

The subject of prayer is an important one. It is a crucial part of the life of a Christian. If we desire closeness to God and our Lord, prayer is an absolute must. In fact, the strength of our "prayer life" very likely correlates with the strength of our relationship with Him. You find prayer in the lives of the strongest Biblical characters, including Jesus Himself. It is a subject that is emphasized often in scripture. So when the disciples of Jesus asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray", it was because they understood its importance. The statement also implies that prayer is something that we need to learn to do properly.

With this in mind, I would like to introduce a focus of our studies for 2024. We are going to engage in an in-depth study of prayer and Bible study. This is about properly communicating with God – both how He speaks to us and how we are to speak to Him.

In our study of prayer, we are going to discuss:

- What is prayer? And the various usages of the word in our English Bibles.
- Examples of men and women who prayed in scripture – Abraham, Moses, Hannah (mother of Samuel), David, Elijah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul, Peter, etc. are all examples of people that prayed.
- Jesus is our ultimate example of what prayer is, as well as how and when to pray.
- God and prayer – He is the foundation of our prayers. We will discuss how He hears our prayers and answers them, He wants us to pray, as well as His character as it relates to prayer.
- We will discuss the blessings found in praying effectually.
- What makes prayer acceptable to God and what makes it unacceptable to Him?
- We will notice the different types and occasions of prayers – both public and private.
- We will address the "model prayer" that Jesus taught.
- We will examine the anatomy of a godly prayer.
- How to pray, what we can and should be praying for, as well as how often we ought to be praying.
- With this we will note some strategies to help us make prayer a meaningful habit in our lives.
- We will notice the psalms as they relate to prayer – many of them are prayers.
- We will discuss our prayers in the assembly, including some of the songs we sing.
- We will answer various questions associated with prayer – praying through Jesus and to Jesus, does God hear the prayers of sinners, is posture important, etc.
- And if there is something else you would like me to address in this study, just let me know.

With that in mind, let us get started with our study of prayer.

I. **What is prayer?**

- a. Simply stated, it is the way God has provided for us to communicate TO Him.

- i. We understand that communication is a 2-way street. That is equally true with our relationship with God. We need to both listen to and talk to Him. And this has eternal consequences, AS WELL AS a bearing on how we live our lives now.
 - ii. Through prayers, we communicate to God what are our needs and requests, as well as acknowledging, praising and thanking Him for who He is and what He has already done for us.
 - iii. God is the originator of the avenue of prayer. Isaiah 55:6 – *Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.* Last week, we discussed the expression, “Calling on the name of the Lord.” In that study, we noted that the first time the term is used is Genesis 4:26 with the lineage of Seth. In that expression, as we noted, prayer was likely involved (but it was NOT exclusively prayer and was certainly not “the sinner’s prayer”). From that time forward, we find communication with God (aka the LORD) – Genesis 12:8, 13:4, etc. – Abraham built altars and “called upon the name of the LORD.”
1 Kings 18:24 finds Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, he said, *Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” So all the people answered and said, “It is well spoken.”* Obviously, the actions of Elijah prayed (1 Kings 18:36-38).
 - iv. Prayer begins with God! He WANTS us to pray to Him –
 - 1. 1 Peter 5:7 – casting all your cares on Him...
 - 2. 1 John 5:14-15 – notes that if we ask, He hears.
 - 3. Luke 18:1, Jesus taught a parable “*that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.*” This leads to a prayer of persistence describing how God wants us to pray to Him
 - 4. Psalm 145:18 says, *The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.* We will address this in an upcoming lesson.
 - 5. Proverbs 15:8, *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.* There is much to “unpack” in this thought, but suffice it for the moment to know that God takes joy when we approach Him.
- b. Several words in the NT & OT that are translated “pray” and “prayer” in its varying forms.
- i. The word “prayer” is found ~140 times in the Bible (53 NT), and the word “pray” is found ~234x (106 NT). So about 374 times the word is used. Add to this a number of other words that are related to prayer, we can see why it is an important subject.
 - ii. The most prominent word in the NT for pray and prayer is προσευχή (proseuchē) or προσεύχομαι (proseuchomai) – found ~140x in NT. It is the common word meaning to pray. When used, it always has reference to approaching God.
 - iii. Δέομαι (deomai) - ~40x in NT, is translated prayers, supplications or requests. This has reference to a request for a need. Sometimes it is associated with intensity – James 5:16 – the effective, fervent prayer...; 1 Peter 3:12 – the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers, etc.
 - iv. ἑντευξις (enteuxis) – is a word translated “intercessions” in 1 Timothy 2:1 and refers to praying on behalf of others. The word is only found 2x – 1 Timothy 4:5 where we are permitted to eat all foods, “*for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*”
 - v. αἴτημα (aitēma) – is translated requests or petitions and is found in Philippians 4:6 & 1 John 5:15 – whatever we ask, we know we have the petitions we have asked of Him.
 - vi. εὐχαριστία (eucharistia) which is associated with the giving of thanks and “thanksgiving”. Found often with other words associated with prayer – 1 Timothy 4:4, Colossians 4:2 - *Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;* Philippians 4:6 - *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;*, etc.

- vii. Other words could be added to these, but we find here an assortment of words that when studied help us understand what prayer is and what it involves.

II. Why should I be praying?

- a. **Because it is commanded** – 1 Thessalonians 5:17. It is also necessarily implied in the above passages, and many others.
- b. **Because God wants us to talk TO Him!** Again, we have already noted this. But let us understand that He is NOT inaccessible. He has done what is needed to make access to Him. Consider:
 - i. Acts 17:26-27, *And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;*
 - ii. His acceptance of Jesus as our intercessor points to this – Hebrews 7:25.
- c. **Because it is a privilege granted to the righteous.**
 - i. If I am living as I ought to, God is there to fulfill His part of our needs and to hear our requests.
 - ii. James 5:16 notes how *“the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much.”*
 - iii. 1 Peter 3:12 (quoting Psalm 34:12-16) says, *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*
- d. **Because I am grateful –**
 - i. Gratitude or thankfulness is a quality lacking in so much of our selfish, entitled & self-centered society. Even when someone is thankful for the actions of another, often one is to prideful to express it OR they just do not give it a second thought.
 - ii. As Christians, if we appreciate God, we WILL express that gratitude to Him in prayer, and let it be known to others.
 - iii. 2 Corinthians 4:15, *For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*
 - iv. 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 – *Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*
 - v. See again, Colossians 4:2 & Philippians 4:6, etc.
- e. **Because I have needs that only God can provide for those, and others that He MIGHT provide.**
 - i. If I have sin in my life as a Christian, how will I be forgiven? 1 John 1:9 – I must confess my sins (to Him) and be forgiven. See also Acts 8:22-24.
 - ii. 1 John 5:14-15 – if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us...
- f. **Because it puts me in my place**
 - i. Humility is crucial quality of proper prayer. There is the realization of who God is and who I am. I am NOT Him! When I offer prayers to God I am acknowledging His greatness (adoration, reverence, praise, etc.) and my unworthiness. BUT, I am also acknowledging His grace, mercy, love and righteousness.
 - ii. That is why being “poor in spirit” is where we begin to approach God (Matthew 5:3).
 - iii. Psalm 8:4 notes, *What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?*

And thus we are introduced to this very deep and personal subject. As we go through this study, we will develop each of these thoughts and many more. It is my hope that you realize how important prayer is in your life as a Christian. And, as with every other area of our life as Christians, we desire to grow even in this blessing. What about you? How is your “prayer life”? Think about it!