

Sunday, June 30, 2024 am

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (17)

Content of our prayers – 3

Last week we continued examining the content of our prayers. Thus far, we have noted the model prayer of Jesus, and last week we looked at some of the Greek words associated with our prayers. Both of these lessons help us to understand some of what we can pray for. In this lesson, I want to look at some of the things we find people prayed for in scripture, to give us a broader perspective of the content of our request to God.

Philippians 4:6 tells us, “...let your requests be made known to God.” In essence, provided something is according to God’s will, we can pray for it – 1 John 5:14-15. So let us notice some who prayed “according to His will”. **What can and should we be praying for?**

- I. **Praising God with thanksgiving.** Don’t forget this in your prayers.
 - a. We have addressed this thoroughly in our study of prayer thus far. Simply stated, do not forget to praise and thank God as you bring your petitions to Him. It is crucial to a proper attitude within our prayers.
 - b. Hebrews 13:15 speaks of the sacrifice of praise, that is the fruit of our lips. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us, “In everything give thanks.”
 - c. There are so many things about which we offer praise and thanksgiving to God. We praise His greatness and Godhood, His creation and character, His awesome name, etc. Many of the psalms are about praising Him. The expression, “Hallelujah” literally means, “Praise YHWH” (Praise the LORD) in Hebrew.
 - d. We thank Him for His blessings both material and spiritual, His grace, mercy, love, compassion and other qualities; for sending Jesus and accepting His sacrifice; for hearing us, for His word, for the church, for faithful brethren; and even the trials and troubles we face as they can make us better.
- II. **Our material needs**
 - a. Of course, such prayers need to be offered according to His will, not selfishly, etc. James 4:3 reminds us of this. In the model prayer, Jesus taught, “give us this day our daily bread” – Matthew 6:11 which is precedent for material requests.
 - b. Luke 1:13 finds that Zacharias and Elizabeth had prayed for children. Family needs.
 - c. James 5:13-14 – if we are sick, pray. NOTE we request that others pray for us as well. 3 John 2 – he prayed that Gaius be in good health.
 - d. As we are facing important decisions – cf. Luke 6:12-13 – as Jesus was about to choose His 12, He first prayed all night. Cf. Acts 1:24 – as they were choosing a replacement for Judas.
 - e. 2 Corinthians 12:8 – Paul’s thorn in the flesh, whatever it was, he pleaded with the Lord 3 times that it be removed. We face struggles of various sorts and can go to God with such (1 Peter 5:6-7).
 - f. James 1:5 – for wisdom. While the text is specifically addressing spiritual wisdom, certainly material wisdom is a worthwhile request. We can consider the blessing of the LORD to Solomon because of that request – 1 Kings 3:6-9. In this you find that other worthwhile qualities we need to develop are suitable to pray for (courage, integrity, patience, honesty, etc.).

- g. Luke 18:3ff – for justice. In the parable of the unjust judge, the woman is pleading for justice. Jesus is speaking about how God rewards persistent prayer. But let us not dismiss what she was asking for. If we are being wronged, it is something we can pray about.
- h. Summary – we can and should be praying for what we have and what we need – food, clothing and shelter (cf. 1 Timothy 6:8), if we are dealing with health issues – physical and mental, our physical struggles (e.g., financial, educational, etc.), our attitudes in dealing with ourselves and others; our relationship with our family and friends - Thankful and at times, specific. New marriage, parents, difficult times, etc.
- i. **NOTICE in these examples of prayers for material things, the absence of selfishness and materialism.** We simply need to ask ourselves if what we are praying for is pleasing to Him and will it in some (genuine) way make us better as Christians.

III. Our spiritual needs

- a. Forgiveness – always needed. Matthew 6:12, cf. 1 John 1:9, Acts 8:22. We have already addressed this. Let me note here that IF you have sin in your life that you have repented of, request forgiveness EARLY in your prayer. Let it be one of the first things you ask for so that your other requests may be heard.
- b. Strength to overcome temptations – Luke 22:40, 46, Matthew 6:13. Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13.
- c. Hebrews 4:15-16 – that as we boldly approach God, we obtain mercy and grace from Him. Cf. Luke 18:13 – “God be merciful to me, a sinner”.
- d. Wisdom – James 1:5, Philippians 1:9-10 - love abounding in knowledge and discernment. Ephesians 1:16-17 – Paul’s prayers for them included a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.
- e. Spiritual growth – 2 Peter 3:18, Colossians 1:9-11 – that we be fruitful in every good work, strengthened with all might, etc.
- f. 2 Thessalonians 1:11 – that we be counted worthy of our calling – a general request that we be in a right relationship with Him. 2 Corinthians 13:9 – that we be made complete.
- g. That we will be open to the truth of His word. Recall the good and honest heart of Luke 8:15 in the parable of the Sower. We all need to continually have open hearts. We all need integrity (virtue) as we approach His word and will (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-6ff, Matthew 5:6).
- h. For renewal – Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23. We all tire from time to time and need to be refreshed. Galatians 6:9 – let us not grow weary.
- i. Summary – we ought to be concerned about our spiritual well-being as it has eternal implications. First and foremost, we desire to be right with God by being forgiven and STAYING forgiven. Prayer is a part of that process in the believer’s life. We ought to also be praying that we resist those occasions that will prompt us to need forgiveness. God wants us to grow, so let us be praying for these things and for others to help us in these matters. We ought to be praying for the tools we need to remove whatever obstacles stand in our way. And ultimately that we will live lives worthy of the gospel (Col. 1:10).

IV. For others

- a. Remember how in our last lesson we spoke about the word *intercession*. It means to plead the cause of another. Thus, we are thinking about others in our prayers.
- b. Our brethren – Philippians 2:3-4 – a summary passage (James 5:16). Some examples of praying for others.
 - i. John 17:20-21 – Jesus prayed for all who believe through the teachings of the apostles, that they be united.

- ii. Luke 22:31-32 – Jesus prays for Peter that his faith would not fail.
 - iii. Philippians 1:9 – Paul is praying that their love abound, as seen above.
 - iv. Acts 12:5, 12 – when Peter was put in prison awaiting execution, the brethren were praying for him.
 - v. Acts 8:24 – Simon the sorcerer asked Peter to pray for him.
 - vi. Romans 15:30-31 – Paul request prayers that he be delivered from unbelievers.
- c. For the church – Colossians 4:12 – Epaphras was praying for his own brethren; Cf. Matthew 6:10 – “your kingdom come” – as noted in our study of that prayer – pray for the furtherance of His NOW established kingdom. Pray for her purity, both locally and abroad. Pray for her uncompromising stand for truth and proper fellowship.
- d. Our leaders –
 - i. Worldly leaders - 1 Timothy 2:1-2 – includes prayers for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life. NOTE the lack of malice in these prayers.
 - ii. Spiritual leaders. Acts 14:23 – as elders were appointed, they fasted and prayed.
 - iii. 1 Thessalonians 5:25, “Brethren, pray for us”.
- e. The wellbeing of God’s creation – cf. James 5:17-18 – Elijah prayed that it would not rain and then that it would rain and produce fruit. We ought to be praying for problems we see in society – droughts, heavy rains, disasters, etc., broken communities, etc.
- f. For the needy – the Bible continually emphasizes that we ought to be concerned about those less fortunate. James 1:27 summarizes this as pure and undefiled religion. Our concern WILL factor into our being judged (cf. Matthew 25:31-46).
- g. Our neighbors – never forget the 2nd greatest commandment (Matthew 22:39 and corresponding passages). Romans 12:18 – as much as depends on you, live peaceably. Certainly, we ought to be praying for wisdom in our dealings with our neighbors, whomever they might be (we have all kinds of them).
- h. Our enemies – Matthew 5:44 (cf. Luke 23:34 – Jesus as He was being crucified). Let it NOT be a malicious prayer or requests (cf. Romans 12:19-21). Always with the desire that God’s will can prevail and flourish.
- i. For the lost – a subcategory of others, but it is worthy of its own attention. We could devote an entire lesson to evangelism and prayer (and I have done so). Here we are simply reminded of some of the things we could pray for.
 - i. Matthew 9:37-38 – pray the Lord of harvest to send out laborers.
 - ii. Colossians 4:2-3 – for open doors
 - iii. 2 Thessalonians 3:1 – that the word of the Lord may run swiftly.
 - iv. Romans 10:1 – for their salvation.
 - v. Ephesians 6:19 – Paul, as part of our armor requested prayers for boldness in teaching.
 - vi. Again, consider wisdom in this as well.
- j. In summary, we ought to be praying for every relationship that we are involved in, physical and spiritual. We pray for our families, our brethren and the physical and spiritual challenges they are facing, their travels. We pray for all mankind and especially our leaders at all levels. We pray for the broken condition of this world and that in whatever way we can have a positive impact, we will act. We need to be praying that we will be the shining light God wants us to be and that we will not hide it, but let it shine brightly (Matthew 5:13-16, Philippians 2:15). Pray that with wisdom we will not intentionally portray Him negatively before others. NOTE: The world DESPERATELY needs our prayers on its behalf.

These are but a few things we can be praying for. The list is endless and fluid, which is why we ought to be praying “without ceasing”. My purpose in this lesson is to challenge us to take some time to THINK about what and who we can and should be praying for, and then make time to do so.