

Lesson 6 – 5 September 2010

"When Thou Prayest"

Lesson Scope: [Matthew 6:1-18; 7:7-12](#)

Lesson Focus

This lesson is a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount. The disciples were gathered closely around Jesus, and the multitudes likely were spread out beyond. Jesus was presenting truths that reached beyond the scope of Old Testament Law. The heart became the point of emphasis, whose out-working affects every area of life.

Jesus exposed the errors of the hypocrites, who promoted an outward expression without a clean heart. They had perverted almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, turning them into a show before men rather than being acceptable in the sight of God.

This lesson holds the key to fulfillment in New Testament Christian experience. Prayer is effective as it comes from a sincere heart backed by a holy life. It is our vital link with God and the key to success in our Christian life.

Prayer is the avenue by which man communicates with God. Right motives are important in maintaining this vital link with God.

This lesson emphasizes a sincerity of heart that seeks God in all of life. There is much to gain by a careful examination of our prayer life, both private and public. There are areas we each do well to be challenged in. Take time to understand the place and value of fasting as well as its proper use as we bring our burdens and cares to our great Burden Bearer.

Lesson Aim: To identify principles for effective communication with God.

Theme Verse: [Ephesians 6:18](#). Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Lesson Text

"Not ... Before Men"

Matthew 6:1-8

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. ²Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. ³But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: ⁴That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

⁵And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. ⁶But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. ⁷But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. ⁸Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

Matthew 6:16-18

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. ¹⁷But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; ¹⁸That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

"After This Manner"

Matthew 6:9-15

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. ¹⁴For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: ¹⁵But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

"Ask ... Seek ... Knock"

Matthew 7:7-12

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: ⁸For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. ⁹Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? ¹²Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Questions for Study

"Not ... Before Men"

1. What are some essentials for effectual prayer?
2. List some things that hinder our prayers.
3. What is vain repetition?
4. Discuss fasting in relation to the Christian life and prayer.

"After This Manner"

5. What are some things that need to be part of our prayers?
6. What place should the Lord's Prayer fill in personal and church life?

"Ask ... Seek ... Knock"

7. Explain the importance of prayer in the life of the Christian.
8. How should we understand the threefold command "Ask ... seek . . . knock"?
9. List some Scriptures that express God's desire to hear and answer the prayers of the saints.

Analyzing the Passage

Jesus, the perfect one sent from God, continues His teachings on how to be perfect as the Father is perfect.

Jesus called them hypocrites who zealously promoted a strict adherence to the Law as they taught it, but who were very corrupt in heart. In many ways they made the Law, of none effect. Jesus exposed their true heart condition.

Jesus' instruction "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:3) stood in direct opposition to the Pharisees' practice of mak-

ing much ado over their giving in order to earn the praise of men. Jesus taught a serving and giving from a heart of love, quietly, with no desire to be seen of men.

Shut thy door (Matthew 6:6), speaks of privacy in our prayers. Vain repetitions (Matthew 6:7) includes anything added for human appeal. Praying, fasting and giving are all acts of worship and should be practiced without thought of being observed.

Jesus' teaching no further gives us a pattern for our prayers in the Lord's Prayer. This model prayer begins with adoration, continues with requests, and ends in praise.

Being evil (Matthew 7:11) speaks of the depraved nature.

Principles and Applications

"Not ... Before Men"

1. Praying in pretense or for show brings God's disapproval (Matthew 6:1-5). God requires sincerity. Pretentious prayer is only mockery, bringing God's judgement. Prayer for show receives only temporary recognition by man and none from God.

2. Prayer is to be directed to God rather than be designed to please the ear of man (Matthew 6:5-6). "Enter into thy closet" "shut thy door." There is a place for public prayer, and public prayer can bless and comfort those who hear it. But the one who prays must pray in humility and worship and never seek the praise of men. To pray for personal praise is to worship self instead of God.

3. Prayer is not mere repetition, but rather must be sincere and truthful (Matthew 6:7-8). We do at times use the same words in prayer, but are we with sincerity praying or are we just saying words? The Lord's Prayer is very familiar, but we must remember to pray it from the heart and not just repeat it.

Truthfulness in prayer is imperative to be effective. We are not truthful if we pray for victory while having no intent to apply ourselves, or pray for forgiveness, confessing sorrow for sin with no intent to grow.

4. A time of sincere fasting will draw us closer to the Father (Matthew 6:16-18). We ought to see fasting as a companion to prayer. Fasting may be done for our own personal benefit or as a result of our deep concern for another. It ought also to be used at times of special need.

"After This Manner"

5. Prayer should include adoration for the Father (Matthew 6:9-10). If we love our heavenly Father, certainly we should tell Him so. Beginning as Jesus did, with expressions of adoration, stirs our hearts and nurtures attitudes of worship in prayer.

6. Prayer is an acknowledgment of our dependence upon God and makes us conscious of our indebtedness to God and man (Matthew 6:11-15). To pray effectively, we must recognize that all we have is from God, and therefore we petition Him for every need. We also then regularly thank and praise Him for meeting those needs.

Greatest of all our blessings is the gift of salvation. Christ's love for us moves us to tell others of that love. We also freely forgive others, recognizing that to do otherwise is to despise our own birthright.

7. Prayer the avenue for the Christian to receive power to be victorious over temptation and sin (Matthew 6:13). We are no match for the forces of evil; this link with the Father is of vital importance. We must guard it carefully and use it regularly. One needs to pray first for his own needs and then we must hold one another to the throne of grace, that each may live in daily victory.

"Ask ... Seek ... Knock"

8. God promises of those who sincerely seek Him (Matthew 7:7-8). He is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). God many times answers our prayers beyond our expectations. Even when the answer is totally different than we expected. He is always seeking our best.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Submission and sincerity are keys to answered prayer.

9. The Father delights in answering the prayers of His children. (Matthew 7:9-12). "The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them" (Psalm 145:18, 19). Many are the Scriptures that express this point.

Important Teachings

1. Praying in pretense or for show brings God's disapproval (Matthew 6:1-5).

2. Prayer is to be directed to God rather than be designed to please the ear

of man (Matthew 6:5-6).

3. Prayer is not mere repetition, but rather must be sincere and truthful (Matthew 6:7-8).

4. A time of sincere fasting will draw us closer to the Father (Matthew 6:16-18).

5. Prayer should include adoration for the Father (Matthew 6:9-10).

6. Prayer is an acknowledgment of our dependence upon God and makes us conscious of our indebtedness to God and man (Matthew 6:11-15).

7. Prayer is the avenue for the Christian to receive power to be victorious over temptation and sin (Matthew 6:13).

8. God promises to answer the prayers of those who sincerely seek Him (Matthew 7:7-8).

9. The Father delights in answering the prayers of His children (Matthew 7:9-12).

Answers to Questions

1. What are some essentials for effectual prayer?

Sincerity and truthfulness are foundational. Forgiveness for others is required. Privacy is also taught, as well as shutting out the things that would disturb our prayers. Fasting also brings added dimension.

2. List some things that hinder our prayers.

Praying to be heard of men and an unforgiving spirit prevent effective prayer.

3. What is vain repetition?

Vain repetition includes any effort to impress men, whether it be the choice of words, the length of our prayers, or our tones. It is right to evaluate our public prayers for clarity and content and to make improvements. We must never criticize a sincere prayer even if it seems wordy or repetitious.

4. Discuss fasting in relation to the Christian life and prayer

Fasting helps us clear our minds of earthly things and to concentrate on the need at hand. It helps us keep the burden sharply in focus. Fasting, coupled with sincerity and prayer, is an avenue that God has provided for us to come to Him with our deepest burdens and cares. Many of us ought to be challenged to use it more.

5. What are some things that need to be part of our prayers?

Prayers should include adoration for our great God, petitions for ourselves and others, praise, and thanksgiving.

6. What place should the Lord's Prayer fill in personal and church life?

It is to be a pattern for prayer. It should be used at times as a prayer, but we must be careful to pray it and not just repeat it.

7. Explain the importance of prayer in the life of the Christian.

It is the Christian's vital breath, the link to the Father for power for victory. We face a foe we are no match for. Remember Jesus' example in spending all night in prayer at various times.

8. How should we understand the threefold command "Ask ... seek ... knock"?

Jesus taught persistence in prayer in the parable of the importunate widow. This triplet also teaches that we can do some things at times to find the answers to our needs.

9. List some Scriptures that express Gods desire to hear and answer the prayers of the saints.

Psalms 86:5-7; 91:15; 102:17-20; 145:18, 19; Proverbs 15:8, 29; Isaiah 58:9; 65:24; and many others.

Summarizing the Lesson

Lord, I have shut the door,
Speak now the word.
Which, in the din and throng,
Could not be heard.
Hushed now my inner heart,
Whisper Thy will,
While I have come apart,
While all is still.
Lord, I have shut the door,
Here do I bow,
Speak, for my soul, attest,
Turns to Thee now.
Rebuke Thou what is vain,
Counsel my soul,
Thy holy will reveal,
My will control.
-- *William M. Runyan*

Research Guide

1. James 5:16-20 is inspirational in connection with this lesson. See also cross references for Matthew 7:7.
2. See Halley's Bible Handbook for details on the Sermon on the Mount.
3. It is interesting to consider the natural acoustics that God created and it seems that Jesus used for teaching vast multitudes. Look in reference books such as Bakers Bible Atlas for the place where tradition places the Sermon on the Mount.