

Prayer and Fasting

A 13 Week Study

Purpose: To encourage the believer to be more diligent in prayer; to educate the believer in the aspects of praying and fasting; to cover examples of prayer and fasting in Scripture.

Date	Class
January 3	Introduction to Prayer and Fasting <i>Luke 11:1-13</i>
January 10	Basics of Scriptural Fasting <i>Matthew 6:16-18</i>
January 17	Examples of Fasting <i>40 Day Fasts, NT Fasts</i>
January 24	Learning How To Pray <i>Model Prayer Matthew 6/Luke 11</i>
January 30	The Elements of Successful Prayer <i>F.A.C.T.S.</i>
February 7	The Power of Prayer <i>Expectations of Prayer</i>
February 14	Keys to Acceptable Prayer <i>Fervent Effective Prayer James 5</i>
February 21	Common Questions on Prayer* <i>Questions from the Congregation</i>
February 28	Public Prayers of the Church <i>1 Corinthians 14</i>
March 7	Prayers of the Old Testament: <i>David and Daniel, PS. 3, Daniel 9</i>
March 14	Prayers of the Old Testament: <i>Elijah and Hezekiah</i>
March 21	Prayers of the New Testament: <i>Jesus</i>
March 28	Prayers of the New Testament: <i>Prayer of NT Christians</i>

* Please submit questions ahead of time

January 3, 2018

CLASS 1: Introduction to PRAYER and FASTING

READING: Matthew 6:1-19, Genesis 20:1-8

INTRODUCTION to PRAYER

WHAT IS PRAYER?

The first mention of prayer in the Bible is in Genesis 20:7. There we see that King Abimelech was warned by God not to touch Sarah. God suggested that he have Abraham “pray” for him. What is worth noting is that Abimelech was talking to God, but it was not the same as praying. Only Abraham could “pray” for him. From that passage we can infer praying is more than just talking to God, but a plea for intercession that has some merit to be received. It is not something that just anyone can do.

QUESTION: *Why could Abimelech not pray for himself?*

PRAYER IS THE PRIVILEGE AND DUTY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

In James 5:16 we are shown how prayer relates to the righteous. The model prayer of Jesus (Matthew 6) shows us prayer was designed for God’s children. Those trying to live righteously have their prayers approved of God (1 Peter 3:10, Psalm 34:15-16). God desires for us to pray to Him (Luke 18:1-8, Ephesians 6:17-18, 1 Timothy 2:1-3). Prayer demonstrates our trust in Him, and our need for Him.

QUESTION: *In what way is prayer a Christian duty?*

PRAYER IS AN ACT OF FAITH

We know we cannot please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). Prayer is a great means of both sustaining, increasing and demonstrating our faith. Prayer is like faith in that it is also requires works; we pray for the things we need, but we must also labor for them.

QUESTION: *How does prayer demonstrate faith?*

QUESTION: *Does prayer increase faith through divine intervention?*

QUESTION: *In what way does successful prayer require works?*

INTRODUCTION to FASTING

WHAT IS FASTING

Fasting is simply defined as voluntarily going without food. We may fast for various reasons; medical, personal fitness, etc. In the spiritual context of Scriptures, fasting is going without food in association with prayer. Fasting is then a means by which we make our prayers more intensive; by fasting we focus our attention in prayer.

QUESTION: *Is fasting purely about food?*

ARE CHRISTIANS COMMANDED TO FAST

Fasting is something, we in the church rarely discuss. There are many misunderstandings about it in general, and it is misunderstood and dismissed by many Christians. Chief among them is the idea that we no longer fast.

There are 22 mentions of fasting in the Old Testament, and 16 mentions of it in the New Testament. We see it practiced by the New Testament church in Acts. Jesus taught on fasting, prayer and giving in Matthew 6:1-16. Jesus uses the word “when” in this passage seven times.

QUESTION: *How can we know that fasting is a New Covenant practice?*

QUESTION: *What can we deduce from Jesus saying “when” in Matthew 6?*

WHAT IS FASTING TO ACCOMPLISH

Prayer, when combined with fasting can help us grow spiritually. Fasting with prayer is not a way to manipulate GOD into doing what you want. It is not supernatural, nor does it make God more likely to hear your prayer in and of itself. Rather it is a way to humble yourself before GOD. When one fasts, their mind is kept focused by deprivation

QUESTION: *How does fasting focus our minds in prayer?*

Notes:

CLASS 2: UNDERSTANDING FASTING

READING: Matthew 6:1-19, Deuteronomy 9:1-10, Isaiah 58:1-7

FASTING IN SCRIPTURES

The principal Hebrew terms for fasting refer exclusively to abstaining from food (and possibly drink), whether personal or corporate in nature, with the primary general occasions being mourning for the dead and worship. Verbs of interest associated with the noun include “to call” or “to proclaim” a fast (1 Kgs 21:9-12; Isa 58:5; Jer 36:9; Jon 3:5; Ezra 8:21; 2 Chr 20:3), “to sanctify” a fast (Joel 1:14, 2:15), and “to keep a fast” (or literally, “to fast a fast,” 2 Sam 12:16). The term “*belongs to the semantic field that also contains weep, mourn, wear sackcloth and ashes, deny oneself, and to do no work.*”¹ The most important other term for this study in this semantic field is to “afflict one’s soul” (as in Lev 16:29, 31, KJV), to “humble one’s soul” (NASB) or to “deny oneself” (NRSV, NIV).

The first mention of fasting in the Bible is by Moses on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 34. Fasting was not a ritual or commandment of the Law of Moses, but was a common practice by the Israelites in their history. We see them fasting in Judges 20:20 during their civil war with Benjamin and in 1 Samuel 31:13 when Saul died. When David’s son was dying in 2 Samuel 12, David fasted until his passing. Ezra fasted in Ezra 8:23 when he asked God for a safe journey, and Nehemiah in Nehemiah 1:4. There seem to be some ritual fasts that were practiced as a whole nation in Zechariah 7:5 and 8:19. God Himself tells us the purpose of fasting in Isaiah 58:4b when He says that “*you do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high*”. Fasting then is meant to place our prayers before God.

QUESTION: *How is fasting a way of humbling ourselves?*

QUESTION: *What circumstances brought forth fasting in the Old Testament?*

QUESTION: *What is the significance of the variety of purpose and times of fasting?*

SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST?

Many Christians mistakenly see fasting as only having occurred in the Old Testament. Yet we know that Jesus fasted (Matthew 4:1-2), and that Jesus said that when He was gone, His disciples would fast (Mark 2:20). We also see early Christians fasting in Acts 10 and 13. Fasting is not a part of the Law of Moses that it would pass away with Christ, nor is it part of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit that it should be finished in the first century. Since its purpose is tied to prayer, and prayer is a duty of Christians. Therefore, we ought to conclude we still fast, and that we ought to learn what it means to fast and how to do so with the correct mind.

IS THERE A SPECIFIC TIME TO FAST

As stated before, Jesus said that there would come a time to fast. There are examples in the New Testament of fasting that might give us an understanding of when to fast.

¹ Robert J. Way, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3: 781

First, we see in Acts 13:1-3 and Acts 14:23 that when the Apostles Paul and Barnabas were appointed, they fasted beforehand. This contrasts with Acts 6:6, when men were selected for a church work with praying, but no fasting. As well, when elders were appointed, fasting occurred.

QUESTION: *Why would fasting accompany selecting men to serve the church?*

QUESTION: *Per Acts 6:6, is it necessary or commanded to fast when selecting men?*

Another time fasting occurs is when people seek to humble themselves or to repent of sin. I Samuel 7:6, I Kings 21:27-29 and Ezra 10:6 are just a few of many examples of people fasting when they were asking God for forgiveness. David makes the case that fasting proves that his soul was humbled (Psalm 35:13, Psalm 69:10-11).

QUESTION: *Why might fasting be associated with a contrite heart?*

Fundamentally, we are learning that fasting is a way of offering emphatic or fervent prayer. This seems to be another constant use of fasting, such as in Deuteronomy 9:8-9 or Jonah 3:5-10. While we are constantly in prayer, sometimes our prayers are of a more fervent or ardent nature due to the circumstances in our lives.

QUESTION: *Are there prayers that are more imperative than others?*

HOW DO WE FAST

As you recall, fasting is simply defined as voluntarily going without food. We are familiar with fasts in Scriptures that went on long periods of times, but when Scripture speaks about times of fasting (i.e. Zechariah 8:19), it refers to a brief time, such as a portion of a day (as in Acts 10:30), or fasting until sunset (Judges 20:26). Daniel fasted in a fashion in Daniel 10:3 for a number of weeks by not eating any “tasty food” or meat.

A Christian might fast in a number of ways. They may fast for only one meal, or for a number of days. They may fast only for a portion of a day, or from specific things. Since it is meant to convey the humility of the heart or the intent of focus on prayer, we can understand fasting to be accomplished in a number of ways.

Notes:

CLASS 3: EXAMPLES OF FASTING

READING: Deuteronomy 9:9-27, 1 Kings 19:5-8, Matthew 4:1-2

THREE 40 DAY FASTS

There are three very important 40 day fasts in the Bible. The first was by Moses, the second was by Elijah, and the third was by Jesus. It is worth noting that two of these fasts occurred in the same location (Mt. Sinai), while the location of the fast of Jesus is not specified (just as being in the wilderness). These three men then came together on “*the holy mountain*” (2 Pet. 1:18) when Jesus was transfigured in Matthew 17.

QUESTION: *What is the significance of 40 days?*

QUESTION: *Both Moses (Deut. 18:15) and Elijah (Mal. 4:4-5) were prophesied to return in a form. Was the mountain of transfiguration that return?*

Moses was called to Mt. Sinai multiple times and seems to have made this fast repeatedly. Mt. Sinai was the same place that he had seen the Angel of the Lord in the burning bush. In Exodus 34 Moses fasts from food and water while God gives him the law. While on the mountain the presence of God passed before him, as he was hidden in a cave. At the end of that time his face was “transfigured” to such a degree that it was necessary for him to wear a veil when he came down before Israel.

QUESTION: *Was it possible for Moses to survive his fast naturally?*

QUESTION: *Moses saw God pass by in Exodus. When did he see God face to face?*

When Elijah had defeated the Baal priests of Jezebel, he was forced to flee for his life. Despairing, God fed him once by ravens and sent him to Mt. Horeb (another name for Mt. Sinai). He fasted for 40 days travelling there. Once there, he too was hidden in a cave while the presence of God passed before him.

QUESTION: *What was different about God revealing Himself to Moses than to Elijah?*

QUESTION: *Is there significance in ravens feeding Elijah?*

Finally, before Jesus began His ministry He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and fasted 40 days. After this He was tempted by Satan. When tempted to make food, Jesus told Satan that man does not live by bread alone; this was a quote of Moses when Israel asked about manna.

QUESTION: *Did Jesus fast again in the NT after this?*

OTHER EXAMPLES OF FASTING

Fasting was never a command in the Law of Moses. There was no fast day (although there are multiple times when the entire nation of Israel fasted, such as Judges 20:26 and Nehemiah 9:1). Throughout the Old Testament there are examples of individuals fasting. Nehemiah fasted when praying to God in Nehemiah 1:4. Daniel fasted on multiple occasions in prayer; as seen in Daniel 9:3. David mentions fasting

QUESTION: *Was fasting a ceremonial requirement of the Law of Moses?*

There are some other examples in the New Testament of fasting. In the Gospels we already saw where the disciples of John fasted. As well, we saw how evangelists in Antioch were fasting while serving God in Acts 13:2 when Saul and Barnabas were called to serve, and then again in the next verse when they sent them forth. Paul and Barnabas fasted when appointing elders in Acts 14.

Notes:

CLASS 4: LEARNING HOW TO PRAY

READING: Luke 11:1-13, Matthew 6:5-15

TEACH US TO PRAY

In the gospel of Luke Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray. They remark that John had taught his disciples how to pray. This is significant in that it implies that prayer is something we must learn how to do; it does not just happen. As we saw in our first lesson with Abimelech, just talking to God is not prayer. Prayer requires a specific mindset and purpose. We can see that if we were to talk to God as if He were just another man, or speak down to God, we might be committing blasphemy.

QUESTION: How do people "talk down" to God?

THE MODEL PRAYER

The model of prayer is brief and to the point. It acknowledges the glory of God. It petitions for only what we need; our forgiveness and our sustenance. It asks God to enable us to avoid temptation and our adversary the Devil. It concludes with an acknowledgement of the greatness of God once more.

QUESTION: How do we know this is a model of prayer and not the exact prayer we are to pray at all times?

QUESTION: Is Jesus saying that God causes us to be tempted?

PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER IN LUKE 11

When Jesus taught His disciples about prayer in Luke 11, He gave them a model of prayer and several points to consider.

First Jesus told them a parable about prayer. It is similar to the one in Luke 18:1-8. Jesus is not saying that God does not act unless we pray a certain amount (Matt. 6:7); He is saying that our prayers ought to be constant and fervent. They should not be frivolous.

QUESTION: How do we know Jesus was not saying that God only hears by many prayers?

QUESTION: How might frivolous prayer sound or be offered?

Second, Jesus made it clear that while God desires to give us good things, He also desires for us to ask for them. He has prepared great things for us, but it is necessary that we "seek", "ask" and "knock" in order to receive them.

QUESTION: Why might God want us to ask Him for blessings?

PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER IN MATTHEW 6

Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. In the middle of the sermon, Jesus makes three statements about spiritual works: giving, praying and fasting. All three have in common the danger of doing them in vain. As in Luke 11, there are multiple principles taught around the model prayer.

Jesus points out that we need to be careful that our attention is focused on God, and not simply sounding eloquent. Prayer is to God, not to men.

QUESTION: *Did Jesus teach us that we are not to pray in public at all?*

Jesus also condemned the use of many words and repetitious words in prayer. We know that some denominations have prepared prayers or prayer books that are like this.

QUESTION: *Why are repetitious prayers unacceptable to God?*

QUESTION: *What are some examples of vain repetition in prayer?*

QUESTION: *Is Jesus teaching that all prayers are to be short? If so, how could some pray without ceasing?*

One other point in Matthew 6 is the attachment of forgiveness to prayer. When we pray, we are asking God for His attention. Yet He has made it clear that unless we are willing to forgive others, He will not forgive us, and God will not hear the prayers of those who are in sin.

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CLASS 5: ELEMENTS OF PRAYER

READING: Mark 11:22-26, Ephesians 1:3-12, 1 John 4:6, Colossians 4:1-2

TEACH US TO PRAY

In our last study we examined Luke 11 and Matthew 6 and Jesus teaching on prayer. There He gave us a model of prayer, not to be word for word repeated, but examined as a pattern. From this we can prepare a pattern of what our prayers should look like to be successful before God. Many have noted that this format looks like this: FACTS – Faith, Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

FAITH

Jesus teaches us that prayer requires us to have faith in God. We need to pray with confidence that if we walk in the light, God hears us (1 John 1:7 and 4:6). We need to have confidence that God desires the best for us, and that even when we ourselves cannot know what we need, God does (Rom. 8:26). Since faith comes by hearing the word (Rom. 10:17), we need to be immersed in the word to grow our confidence in prayer.

QUESTION: *Can we pray when we are weak in faith (see Mark 9:24)?*

ADORATION

Adoration means to praise or glorify. Note that Jesus prayer begins with “*hallowed be Your name*”. It matters that with our mouth we praise God; that is what we were created to do (Ephesians 1:12). When we begin our prayers with thoughtful words that reflect the greatness of God, we are less likely to be frivolous in our petitions.

QUESTION: *What are some of the words we use in adoration of God?*

CONFESSION

One of the hindrances to God hearing prayers is sin (John 9:31, Job 27:9; 35:12; Ps 18:41; 34:15; 66:18; Pr 1:28; 15:29; 28:9; Isa 1:15; Jer 11:11; 14:12; Eze 8:18; Mic 3:4; Zec 7:13). The Bible says to those who are in the covenant of Christ may confess their sins to God in prayer, and that He is faithful to cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Thus, confession of sins ought to be one of the first things we do in any prayer.

QUESTION: *How can prayers of one who is not in a covenant with Christ be heard?*

THANKSGIVING

We are constantly told to be giving thanks to God for the abundance that He bestows on us (Col. 3:15, Heb. 13:15, 1 Thes. 1:2, 3:9, 5:18, etc). There is a particular emphasis on putting our giving of thanks into prayer (Col. 4:2, Phil. 4:6). Being thankful and grateful is simply the right thing to do in prayer. But more than this, when we consider the things we are thankful for, we often find that many of our worries in life are not as great as we perceive.

QUESTION: *How does “counting our blessings” help us to overcome difficulties?*

SUPPLICATION

Supplication means to ask for something. In the Scriptures, terms like “supplication” (Phil. 4:6) and petition are used to describe our requests to God. Often, it is our needs that cause us to turn to God in prayer. Jesus said that when we ask our Father for the things we need, we are confident that, as a Good Father, He will provide. Jesus said that when we ask in His name, we will receive. Our supplications need to be for those things that we know to be in the will of God; if we ask amiss, we will not receive (James 4:3).

QUESTION: *What does it mean to ask amiss?*

Notes:

February 7, 2018

CLASS 6: THE POWER OF PRAYER

READING: James 5:13-20, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, 1 John 5:14-17

EXPECTATIONS OF PRAYER

Most of us have prayed for things or events that never occurred. We prayed for a restoration of health that never transpired, or a change of fortune that did not come to pass. We prayed for spiritual or physical opportunities, and were disappointed. When we examine the passages on prayer, this seems to be contrary to the teachings of Scripture, which seem to suggest a constant result. Jesus said that "*if you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it*" (John 14:14). James said that "*the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick*" (James 5:15). Why is it that sometimes our prayers do not seem to be answered?

QUESTION: *In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, was Paul's request to God granted?*

WHO SPOKE FIRST?

First, let us consider the idea that "God answers prayers". Some might suggest that God answers all prayers, just not always yes. This is a simple way to perceive this that is not entirely inaccurate. But perhaps it is more accurate to understand the idea of "answering prayers", a term not found in the Bible. In conversation, an answer is the second statement made, either responding to a question (John 9:3) or a statement (John 3:3). In our conversation with God, who spoke first? The answer is of course God. God spoke first to us through the Word (Heb. 1:2). Therefore, our prayers are the answer to God; specifically, they are a reply to what God has said to us in His Word.

QUESTION: *If prayers are a response to what God has said in His word, how would this impact those who do not listen to the Word of God first (John 9:31)?*

PRAYING FOR THE WILL OF GOD

Putting on a mindset that our prayers are a response to God's speaking to us is important. It reveals one of the most important aspects of prayer that is often overlooked: praying for the will of God (1 John 5:14). Believe it or not, many people say that we cannot know the will of God. There are some things that God has told us that we cannot know; for example, the hour of Jesus' return (Mark 13:33) or what will happen in the future (James 4:14). But for many things, we can know what God desires for us, and what He is willing to do for us. Our prayers are most appropriate when we ask the question: what has God said about this?

For example, God has said that it is not good for a man to be alone (Gen. 2:18), and it is a favor from God to find a good wife (Prov. 18:22). Thus we see that prayer is warranted (and perhaps the main avenue) for a single Christian to find a wife. God desires for all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4); this is not to say that God overlooks disobedience, but desire for men to know Him. Therefore, we pray in accordance to this. In 1 John 5:17 John says not to pray for forgiveness for those who have sinned unto death; while this can be a confusing passage, it is likely that since this is a reference to the unforgiveable sin (of rejecting the Holy Spirit), John is saying that we cannot ask God to save someone who has heard the Word and rejected it. Therefore, we can see how to pray for someone who is not saved.

QUESTION: *What are some examples of things God has offered us that we can ask for?*
 QUESTION: *What are some examples of things God does not offer that we cannot ask?*

There are a number of examples of this mindset in prayer. In Daniel 9, we see Daniel reading the writings of Jeremiah. He sees God’s promise of restoration after 70 years, and prays for it. Daniel knew by the Word God’s will, and asked for it. When we ask for things that are not in the will of God, or even for the “right” things but for reasons that are not right, we cannot expect God to provide (James 4:3).

QUESTION: *How was Israel’s request for a king an example of asking for something God offered but doing so with the wrong motivation? How did God view it?*

QUESTION: *For what were the Christians in James 4:3 asking (see James 1:5-6)?*

Pray for one another	James 5:16
Pray for our leaders	1 Timothy 2:1
Pray for teachers of truth	2 Thessalonians 3:1
Pray for knowledge	Colossians 1:9
Pray for wisdom	James 1:5
Pray for those who mistreat you	Luke 6:28
Pray for health	3 John 2, James 5:15
Pray for suffering to end	James 5:13
Pray for love to abound	Philippians 1:9

QUESTION: *In the list of things we may pray for, is there anything else we need to do?*

PRAYING FOR MORE THAN THE MIND OF GOD

It might seem that the point of this study leads us to believe that it is a sin to ask for things God has not promised. However, there are examples in Scripture of just that. Moses asked for God to spare Israel when God was intent on destroying it. Hezekiah asked for God to spare his life when he was told he would die. Abraham asked God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if there were 10 righteous people. It is not *necessarily* a sin to ask for something that God has not promised, although there are times when it is (consider Simon in Acts 8:19). What is remarkable in the examples of Moses, Abraham and Hezekiah is this: GOD CHANGED HIS MIND for them.

We need to consider carefully what this implies. First of all, these men were known as exceedingly righteous before God (Exodus 33:11, James 2:23, 2 Kings 18:5). We are told that as we grow in faith, we grow in the aspect of Godliness (2 Pet. 1:6), which is to say, we put on the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:16). Therefore, their mind and thoughts were constantly in the mind of God. These were not selfish petitions, but the imploring of righteous hearts serving God. Growing in the grace and knowledge of God causes our prayers to be heard by God in a particular manner, BUT it also means our mind has become in tune with the mind of God, and we ask for things that are in line with His will.

QUESTION: *How does “counting our blessings” help us to overcome difficulties?*

THE CONSTANT ANSWER OF PRAYER

Our original question spoke to the issue of prayer and the question of why it seems that prayer is not always answered the way we desire. Let us now put on a more mature view of these things. When we pray for the will of God, we can have greater confidence that our prayers are being heard, for indeed they were in the Mind of God even before we asked. Jesus words in Mark 11:24 make more sense now: "*therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you*". That belief is faith, and since faith comes by hearing the Word of God, we must hear God before we can be confident He hears us.

There is one other point to consider. Prayer is not a request list, but it does always provide us a benefit. There is an old proverb (from an unknown secular source) that says a man of prayer was once asked "*what do you gain by regularly praying to God?*" The man replied "*nothing, but let me tell you what I've lost: anger, greed, depression, insecurity, and fear of death.*" Sometimes the benefit to prayer is not in what we gain but what we lose. Turning over our troubles to God is the greatest benefit to prayer.

Notes:

CLASS 7: FERVENT EFFECTIVE PRAYER

READING: James 5:13-20, Luke 18:1-7, John 16:23-24, James 1:5-8

WANTING TO BE EFFECTIVE IN PRAYER

All of us want to receive the total benefit of prayer. Our last study revealed that we are asking God for things He has already prepared for us, and that prayer can remove many of the worries and problems with which we struggle. James says the following: *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"* (James 5:16 NKJV). How can our prayers "avail much"? By learning fervency, effectiveness and the importance of being righteous.

QUESTION: *Who is the example James turns to in James 5? What is the significance of his having a nature like ours?*

FERVENT PRAYER

In the original Greek, fervent and effective are both one word: *energeo*, which speaks to something working in a highly effective capacity. How are prayers fervent? A great example of fervency is in the parable of Luke 18:1-7. There Jesus makes an illustration of someone being emphatic and pressing in their petitions. Another word for fervent is ceaseless. We are to pray "without ceasing", which could be seen as praying constantly (1 Thes. 5:17).

QUESTION: *What are some examples of being emphatic in prayer?*

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

How is it that prayers are made effective? We might consider this as an opportunity to learn about the mechanics of prayer. As we saw in our first class, prayer is more than just a conversation. If someone went before a king or queen, their speech would involve protocol and decorum.

QUESTION: *If you were talking to a King or Queen, how would you prepare yourself?*

When Jesus taught prayer, He first taught us to pray to the Father (Matt. 6:9, John 16:26). Almost all of the examples of prayer in the New Testament are addressed to God as our Father, with a few exceptions (i.e. 2 Cor. 12:8, John 14:14 NASB). We are able to pray to the Father because of the gift of Jesus, whom we have put on in baptism (Gal. 3:26). Because of this gift, we stand before the Father as sons or daughters, and He hears us as His children. Jesus said that we are to pray in His name (John 16:23); this is why we usually end our prayers *"in Jesus name"*. Doing something "in His name" means "by His authority" (consider the expression *"in the name of the law"*).

QUESTION: *Is prayer the only thing we do in the name of Jesus (Col. 3:17)?*

We are told that prayers are effective when they are made in Faith. Jesus said in Mar' 11:24 *"whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them"*. In James 1:5-8 James tells us we can ask for wisdom, but only if we do so without doubting. In this case James goes on to say that the doubt he speaks of is being doubleminded, i.e. worldly. This is the problem he points to as well in James 4:3.

QUESTION: *How can we pray without doubt?*

A RIGHTEOUS MAN

Finally, we consider the concept of being a righteous man. Many might be tempted to believe that no one can be righteous. Yet Scriptures teach that one *“who practices righteousness is righteous”* (1 John 3:7). For God to hear our prayers, we need to be walking in the light. If we are in sin, then our *“iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear”* (Isaiah 59:2).

QUESTION: *How do we reconcile 1 John 3:7 with Romans 3:10?*

There are many variations of this truth. Peter warned husbands to *“live with your wives in an understanding way..... so that your prayers will not be hindered”* (1 Peter 3:7). Jesus spoke of the need to be reconciled to your brother whom you have wronged before offering something to God (Matt. 5:23-24). We must forgive those who sin against us in order to ask God to be forgiven (Mark 11:26-26). It is important that we consider that the same God is Father of all; if we have wronged His children, can we rightly expect Him to come to our aid (Malachi 2:10 asks Israel about this when it says *“do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?”*

We cannot be in sin and be heard by God. We must first leave sin (repentance) and confess to God our sins (*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins – 1 John 1:9*) before petitioning God.

QUESTION: *What is the difference between someone who is a Christian leaving sin and one who is not a Christian who seeks to leave sin; do they do the same thing?*

Notes:

February 21, 2018

CLASS 8: QUESTIONS ON PRAYER

- 1. Is fasting a task to pursue or a result of devoted prayer?**
- 2. Is fasting a work of Christians today?**
- 3. What did Christ mean when He prayed “let this cup pass from me”?**
- 4. Did the Apostles know how to pray?**
- 5. Is prayer necessary to be out loud?**
- 6. Can we pray without using specific words?**
- 7. How can we sin and ask for forgiveness if God does not hear sinners?**
- 8. Can we pray for help for sins with which we struggle?**
- 9. Should I be fasting?**

CLASS 9: PUBLIC PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

READING: Matthew 6:5-13, 1 Corinthians 14:15-16, 33-40

IS PUBLIC PRAYER ACCEPTABLE?

When Jesus taught about prayer in Matthew 6, He makes the statement that one should “*go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place*”. Some see this as a commandment that forbids public prayer. However, this is an example of Jesus speaking in hyperbole (extreme examples), as He does on many occasions (“pluck out your eye”, “cut off your hand”, “give away all that you possess”, “hate father and mother”).

QUESTION: *How do the pronouns in Matthew 6:9-12 authorize public prayer?*

We know that public prayers are authorized because there are a number of them in the New Testament church. Therefore, we need to understand what Jesus’ point was in this teaching. Specifically, He was condemning prayers that were to glorify the pray-er, not God. One example of public prayer in the New Testament church is in Acts 4:24-31. There it tells us that the church raised their voice in one accord (called a prayer in verse 31). In that prayer they quoted Scripture and asked for boldness to speak. Another example is when the church was praying for Peter in Acts 12:5-12.

PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC PRAYER

If we can see that we are authorized to pray publically, and that there are examples of praying publically, what are the principles of public prayers, and are they different that the prayers we offer privately?

First, public prayers as revealed in Scripture are understandable. In 1 Corinthians 14:15-16 Paul discusses public prayer, and makes it clear that a prayer must be understood with the intention that all can agree with it and declare “amen” (the word “Amen” is a Hebrew word that means “surely, indeed, truly”). A public prayer must be understood by all, EVEN the unbeliever.

QUESTION: *How does this principle relate to churches that pray in a foreign language, like Latin? How about those who claim to pray in tongues?*

This also causes us to be careful NOT to use words that are unfamiliar. It is tempting to pray with “thee” and “thou”, but will that be clearly understood? Is it possible that in using these terms we are actually praying to sound impressive? If so, we are violating Jesus’ teaching on public prayers. Prayers need to be effective, not eloquent.

QUESTION: *How does the focus on eloquence in prayer pose a problem in light of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 6?*

Second, public prayers are seen as short. Jesus’ model prayer was a public prayer; it takes less than 30 seconds to read. The prayer in Acts 4 is also short. Public prayers are short for obvious reasons. When someone is leading a public prayer, they are supposed to be

representing the minds of all who are there. The longer the prayer, the less likely that everyone is of one mind.

QUESTION: *If public prayers need to be short, is that true of private, personal prayers (consider 1 Thes. 5:17)?*

QUESTION: *If public prayers need to be short, how might the church have gathered to pray in Acts 12:12 to pray for Peter?*

Third, public prayers ought not to be used to preach a lesson. This is not a reference to the length, but the substance. Prayers are petitions to God, but sometimes it is tempting to include thoughts that might convict those who are hearing. While it is possible this could happen regardless, it CANNOT be the purpose or intent of prayer. Prayer is to God, not to men, and it is not appropriate to pray with the audience as the intent.

QUESTION: *What is an example of praying a sermon?*

Fourth, public prayers need to be inclusive. When someone is privileged to lead a prayer for a group, they ought to keep in mind the needs of all who are praying. We ought not to see public prayer as being a private prayer out loud, but trying to reflect the common mindset of the brethren in the moment. It ought to consider the purpose of the gathering and the need of the moment.

QUESTION: *How might a prayer before a bible study be different than a prayer before worship, or at the Lord's Table?*

ARE PUBLIC PRAYERS MORE EFFECTIVE?

Sometimes we feel that public prayers are more effective than private prayers. It is true that Jesus teaches that we ought to pray for one another, and that we should pray often. Yet we also need to understand that the effectiveness of prayer is based not on the number of people who are praying, but on the spiritual condition and purpose of the person praying. As James points out in James 5, Elijah was a man without nature, yet his single prayer stopped all the rain in the land. It is not the volume of prayer that is effective, but we ought to be offering God a great deal of prayer in praise and thanks.

QUESTION: *When we ask for prayers of others, what should we be thinking?*

Notes:

March 7, 2018

CLASS 10: PRAYERS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

READING: Psalm 3, Daniel 9:4-19

PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

When we pray today, we do so in the name of Jesus Christ. This privilege means that our prayers are heard by the Father as though it is Jesus Himself. Of course, this is the privilege of those who are in Christ, the very mechanism that allows this to occur. This does not mean that those of the Old Testament went unheard by God. God heard Abram (Gen. 17:20) on multiple occasions. God heard the Israelites (Ex. 2:24), and Solomon testified that God heard the prayers offered at the Temple (1 Kings 8:30-38). So we are certain then that God heard prayers, perhaps through the intercession of a pre-incarnate Christ.

QUESTION: *What are the differences between prayers of OT Saints and NT Saints?*

PRAYERS OF DAVID

We know that David's prayers were heard of God; it is not clear that God spoke to David directly, but seemingly always through an intermediary (prophet or priest). Yet David spoke to God as though there were a constant conversation in place. David's Psalms in particular offer excellent examples of prayer. In fact, we are commanded to sing them (Eph. 5:19). They are typically divided into several categories: the hymn of praise, the lament, and the prayer of thanksgiving, some being all three at once.

One excellent example of this is Psalm 3. The context of this prayer is that David was fleeing from Absalom. He points out that many think he is lost; however, his hope is in God. He proclaims that he will not be afraid (although it appears that as he wrote this he had not yet overcome Absalom).

QUESTION: *Is writing out a prayer still a prayer?*

QUESTION: *How can David ask for the destruction of his enemies (see Ps. 58:6)?*

QUESTION: *In general, what do David's prayers reflect on his heart?*

PRAYER OF DANIEL

A very important prayer in the Scriptures is found in Daniel 9. There Daniel, advanced in age, read Jeremiah's promise of the 70 year exile. He begins his prayer acknowledging that God is good, and that His law is good. Therefore, the sins of Israel are not His fault. He goes on to fully accept the guilt of the sins of Israel. He points out that the hope that they have that God should forgive them is His compassion; there is nothing in Israel that warrants this forgiveness. The whole prayer is a model of a prayer of the petition for the forgiveness of sins.

QUESTION: *Why is being grieved for sin so important in prayer?*

The remarkable thing about Daniel's request is that it was something that God had already promised. He had already said that at the end of 70 years (Jer. 29:10) He would restore Israel to the land. Yet Daniel's prayer is made as though God might not. This attitude is not because there was some question that God might not do what He said, but an acknowledgement that

God did not have to do it, and that Israel did not deserve it. Thus Daniel prays as though it is all up to him to get God's mercy.

QUESTION: *Do we pray for things God has already promised us?*

QUESTION: *Often prayers in the Old Testament plead the name of God over His people as a reason why God should have mercy (Dan. 9:19). In what way do we do this today?*

Notes:

CLASS 11: PRAYERS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT (2)

READING: 1 Samuel 1:11-12, 2:1-10; 1 Kings 17:1, 18:1, 43-45; 2 Kings 19:15-20; 20:1-11

PRAYER OF HANNAH

The prayer of Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, is quite short, and indeed for the many prayers of the Old Testament it is perhaps the smallest. Yet it is remarkable for several reasons. First, it is not presented as a prayer, but as a vow. Second, the subsequent prayer of Hannah (2:1-10) is also remarkable. In this case, Hannah “reasons” with God in her petition. This is something we need to take great care when we do; we can only reason with God when it is in His will. Hannah desires a son, but it is to the glory of God. When He gives her that petition, she is appropriately grateful.

QUESTION: *How can we reason with God today?*

QUESTION: *What is the importance of gratitude towards God (Luke 12:21)?*

PRAYER OF ELIJAH

We studied earlier the prayer of Elijah as mentioned in James 5. There we took note of the character of prayer in general that is successful in pleading to God. There are several prayers of Elijah in scripture; he prayed that a child might be restored to life (1 Kings 17:21). But the actual prayer of Elijah that is referenced in James 5 is quite brief, but has several things that we ought to consider.

First, while James calls this a model of prayer, it is not called (or described) as prayer in the actual text. Instead, it is a proclamation by Elijah to Ahab. Yet we ought to consider that this is a prayer; had Elijah not prayed, it would not have happened. Elijah is an example that God expects us to pray for the things He works to happen. Second, consider how it must have felt to be Elijah in 1 Kings 18:43; six times his servant went looking for clouds without seeing any. Yet with the appearance of the cloud, he warns Ahab to flee the coming rains. Elijah was bold in prayer, even without physical evidence that it was going to happen

QUESTION: *How can we be bold in prayer?*

PRAYER OF HEZEKIAH

There are several remarkable prayers attributed to Hezekiah. One was for the deliverance of his country, the other was for his life. They are both remarkable and worthy of consideration in our study of prayer.

First, Scriptures reveal that when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian army (1 Kings 19), that Hezekiah petitioned God for deliverance. It is important that he trusted entirely on God to deliver him; there was no seeking of aid from another. While this destruction was well deserved by Jerusalem, Hezekiah’s faith obtained deliverance.

QUESTION: *To what circumstance did Hezekiah appeal to God for deliverance (meaning, what was Hezekiah’s reasoning that God might deliver them)?*

Later in his life the prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah he was going to die. Hezekiah turned to the wall and prayed to God in a general manner. God heard this prayer and responded immediately. At the same time, a medical prescription was given for his restoration of health.

QUESTION: *What does Hezekiah's prayer teach about the relationship of prayer and medical treatment?*

QUESTION: *Why did God heal Hezekiah?*

Notes:

CLASS 12: PRAYERS OF JESUS

READING: John 17, Matthew 26:37-45

THE PRAYERS OF THE SON OF GOD

When we consider that Jesus is Himself God (John 1:1), it is perhaps a bit strange to think of Him praying to the Father. Yet we know that a large part of Jesus' life was dedicated to prayer (Luke 5:16); He often went off alone to dedicate a day (Matthew 14:23) or an entire night (Luke 6:12) to praying. He prayed when He performed miracles (John 11:42); He prayed when He blessed children (Matthew 19:13). We know that Jesus had the mind of the Father, being God Himself (John 10:30). Therefore, we see that prayer was a necessity of the incarnate Christ.

QUESTION: *For what kinds of things did Jesus pray?*

There are several prayers of Jesus that are of particular note. One is the prayer of Unity in John 17, and the second is the prayer in the Garden on the night He was betrayed. It is not impossible that John 17 is in fact the prayer in the garden.

JESUS PRAYER FOR UNITY

In John 17, Jesus summed up the teaching to the disciples with His prayer for unity. That prayer had three parts. First, Jesus speaks about Himself and what He accomplished for the Father. He prays for the Glory that He had come to receive. Second, He prays for His particular apostles, that they might have success in overcoming the world. Third, He prays for all believers. He desires that all men might be one. Consider this work as described by Paul in Ephesians 2:15-16. There Paul states that the work of the cross was (in part) to reconcile all men as one before God.

Some of the things Jesus prayed about are things that were accomplished by His death. He was given the Glory of Kingship in His overcoming (Isaiah 53), and was given all authority from the Father (Matthew 28:18). He looks ahead to the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would reveal all things, and offer sanctification through that revelation (17:17).

QUESTION: *Who is the son of perdition?*

QUESTION: *Why did Jesus pray that we NOT be removed from the world?*

QUESTION: *How can we have unity in Christ?*

JESUS PRAYER IN THE GARDEN

After Jesus had finished with the last Passover, He and His disciple went to the Mount of Olives, also called Gethsemane. There, in the middle of the night, he withdrew from the disciples and prayed. Scripture records that Jesus prayed three times to the Father. His purpose was to be encouraged for what He was about to do. While it may seem that He was weak in the moment, in John 12:27 Jesus reveals that while He was troubled, He knew that for this purpose He had come. In John 12:28 the Father spoke from Heaven to confirm to Jesus that He would be glorified for His work.

Hebrews 5:7-9 tells us that this is a significant moment in the life of Christ. In that place in particular Jesus learned obedience, and was heard by the Father. This speaks too to the need to be made perfect (complete).

QUESTION: *What is the significance of sweat becoming like drops of blood?*

QUESTION: *What is the significance of Jesus calling the Father "Abba"?*

QUESTION: *How could Jesus, who is God, learn something?*

QUESTION: *How did the Father respond to Jesus?*

Notes:

March 28, 2018

CLASS 13: PRAYERS OF NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS

READING: Acts 4:23-31, Acts 7:59-60, Acts 8:22-24, 1 John 5:16, Acts 10:2-4,31, Acts 12:5,12, Acts 16:25

THE PRAYERS OF ASSEMBLED CHURCH

There are a number of prayers mentioned in the book of Acts (about 25 total). Often it is simply mentioned that brethren were praying, and other times the substance of the prayers are mentioned. We can assume that many of the prayers are paraphrased for the purpose of reading, as they mention length of time while also a brevity of message.

In Acts 4:23-31 and Acts 12:5,12 we read about the church being collected together for the purpose of prayer. In both instances, it is provoked by a serious problem in persecution. In Acts 4, the church prayed collectively, although it is clear that one person led the prayer.

QUESTION: *Regarding the prayer of Acts 4, does the quoting of Scripture in prayer offer any insight into how we pray?*

QUESTION: *Regarding the prayers in Acts 12, why is it odd that the church did not believe Peter had been released?*

QUESTION: *Are the collective prayers of the church more likely to be heard than the prayers of an individual saint?*

STEPHEN'S PRAYER

In Acts 7:59-60, as Stephen was being murdered by the Jews, he utters a simple prayer in death. It is a very unusual prayer for a number of reasons. First, it is to Jesus, and second, it is to forgive those who were stoning him. We need to consider the idea that while we can pray for others in forgiveness, this may not mean their sins are utterly wiped away before God. In 1 John 5:16, we are told that others cannot be forgiven of sins they will not repent from; therefore, we can conclude that Stephen was not actually petitioning the guilt of their sin be cleansed, but a cry in his last moments that demonstrated he would not hold it against them; perhaps we can consider Matthew 6:14.

QUESTION: *If given the opportunity, what would be your last moment's prayer?*

SIMON'S PETITION FOR FORGIVENESS

Simon the Sorcerer sinned by seeking to buy the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When charged with this sin, he asked Peter to pray for him. Yet Peter's commandment was not to have his sins expunged by the prayers of the apostles, but by repentance. We need to know that, again referring to 1 John 5:16, only by repentance can prayers have an effect on sin. Even the Apostles could not merely lift sins, although they could teach the means to have sin removed (consider John 20:23 as paralleled by Luke 24:46-49).

QUESTION: *What prayers can we offer for those who are in sin?*

CORNELIUS' PRAYER

Another highly unusual prayer is that of Cornelius in Acts 10:2-4. There we read about the Gentile centurion whose prayers are heard by God, and a messenger of the Gospel is sent. It

is unusual because of the language of John 9:30, which tells us that sinners are not heard by God. This is not a contradiction of this message, but lets us understand that, like the Jews, the Gentiles who were seeking God were heard of God. Cornelius was not saved until he heard the words of Peter (Acts 11:14); it is clear he was not saved by the coming of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTION: *What laws of God were Gentiles accountable to before Christ?*

Notes: