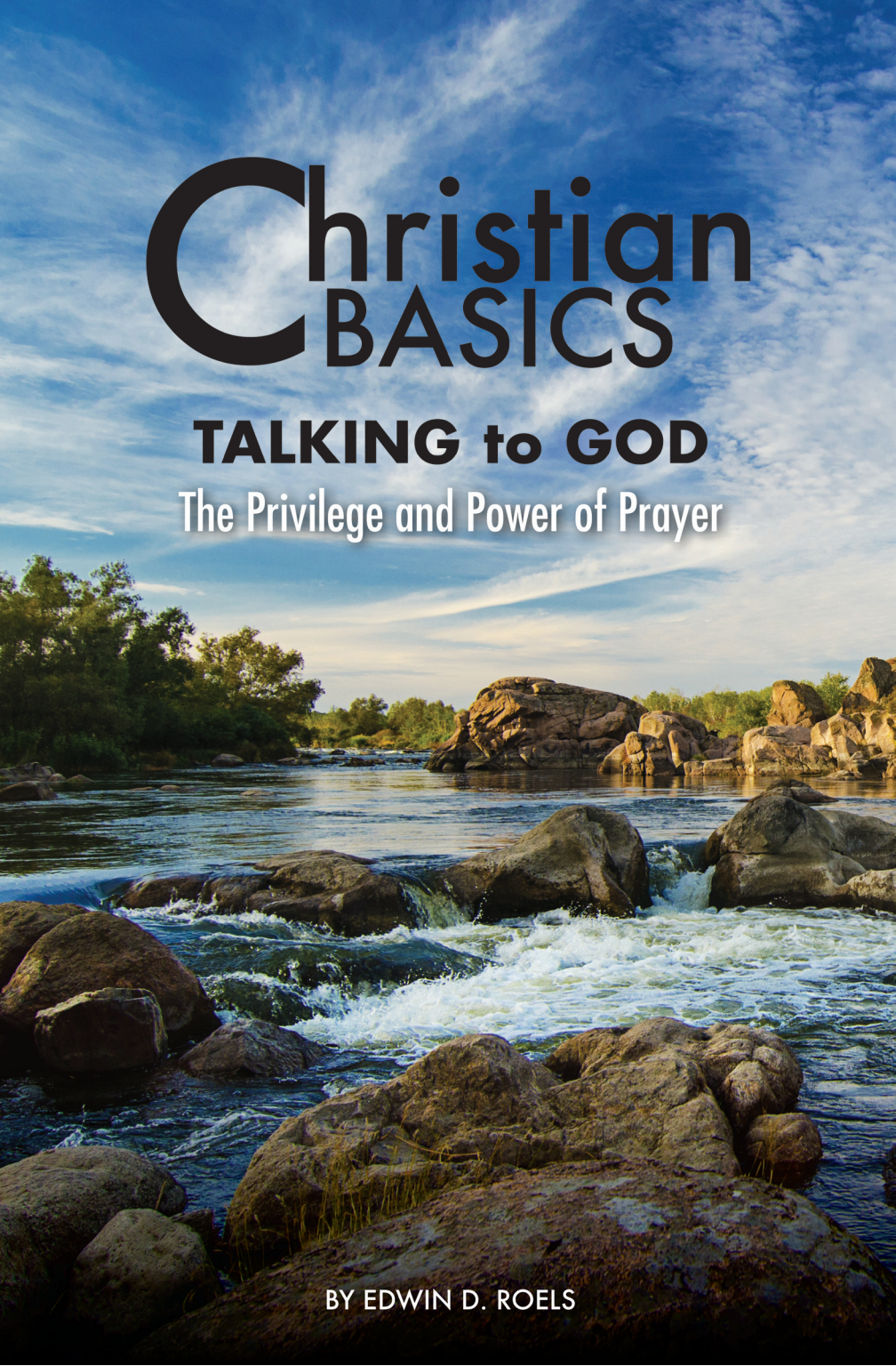


The background of the cover is a photograph of a river flowing over large, dark, rounded rocks. The water is turbulent, creating white foam and rapids. The sky is a vibrant blue with wispy white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful yet dynamic, suggesting a natural setting for reflection and prayer.

Christian BASICS

TALKING to GOD

The Privilege and Power of Prayer

BY EDWIN D. ROELS



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FOREWORD

This is the second course in a series of studies on the basic teachings of the Bible on subjects of special interest to Christians and to everyone who would like to know what the Bible teaches about these subjects.

This course focuses on PRAYER. Though it is an academic study, its primary intention is not simply to provide information about prayer but rather to encourage readers to pray more fervently and more frequently. If your study of this course simply enables you to find interesting answers to some of your questions about prayer but does not encourage you to pray or give you increased joy and blessing in your prayer life, you will have missed the purpose of studying this course.

There are many wonderful stories of special answers to prayer in the Bible. These stories are both inspiring and encouraging. However, there are also times when sincere believers, both in Bible times and throughout history, did not receive the answers they had prayed for or longed for. You may have experienced that in your own life as well. In this course you will not find answers to all the questions you have about “unanswered” prayer, but you will find reasons why at least some of our prayers are not answered as desired.

This course also provides answers to many practical questions about when and how and where we should pray. It also discusses the different “kinds” of prayer which are sometimes referred to the ACTS of prayer—referring to prayers of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

It is my sincere desire that your sincere and diligent study of this course will lead you to develop a joyful and fruitful prayer life that will bring glory to God and will also bring many blessings both to you and to others whose lives are influenced by your faithful prayers.

Edwin D. Roels



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THE BLESSING OF PRAYER

Lesson One

PRAYER

Introduction

Historically, prayer has been extremely important for Christians. Through prayer we reach the heart of God and gain access to the power of God. When we pray, we no longer depend on our own strength or ability or knowledge or resources. Rather, we open up our lives to let God work through us in wonderful and marvelous and even surprising ways.

Jesus Himself spent much time in prayer. At times He prayed all night. He prayed fervently at the turning points of His life—before choosing His disciples, before going to the cross, while on the cross, before Peter’s denial and restoration, before raising Lazarus from the dead, before breaking the loaves and the fish. He also urged His followers to pray intensely, faithfully, unceasingly, in times of gratitude and in times of need.

How foolish it is for us not to pray when God promises to hear us, help us, encourage us, protect us, strengthen us and guide us. Our prayers do not have to be long, because sincerity is more important than length. Bodily position isn’t crucial since already in Bible times people prayed with their face to the heavens or to the ground, with their knees bent or while standing. And the place where they prayed was of relatively minor significance. Believers prayed at home, in the temple, on the road and on the sea. They prayed when others could see them and they prayed when they were in secret. They prayed with others and they prayed alone.

The Bible contains many promises regarding prayer, encouragements to pray, and incentives to pray. The Bible also assures us that God hears our prayers and answers them. In

this course we will look at all those dimensions. But the goal of studying this course is not simply to learn more about the subject of prayer, but rather to be inspired to pray—to pray more earnestly, more sincerely, and more frequently. Studying what the Bible says about prayer is certainly good and may help us in many ways. But the study must lead to actual, fervent, frequent, passionate prayer—or it will have only minimal value.

There are at least four different “kinds” of prayer in the Bible and each one is considered in this course. The four “kinds” of prayer referred to are Adoration (Praise), Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (making requests). Many people refer to these four categories as the ACTS of prayer (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication). Individual prayers may include one or more of these categories, but our prayer life should increasingly include all four.

Prayers of Adoration or Praise. The Book of Psalms in the Old Testament contains far more prayers of adoration than any other book in the Bible, though expressions of praise are found in other books of both the Old and New Testament as well.

Prayers of Confession. Some prayers of confession, such as the prayer of David recorded in Psalm 51, deal primarily with personal sins and failures. Others, such as those of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:5-7) and Daniel (Daniel 9:1-19) deal more with the sins of larger groups such as the nation of Israel. These men realized that prayer is not *simply* an individual matter. They recognized that in a sense we all share in the sins of the body of Christ and in our national sins in some way—even if we personally do not commit those sins.

Prayers of Thanksgiving. When we pray prayers of thanksgiving we demonstrate that we realize where our blessings come from. Others may share in the same blessings we do (sunshine, food, rain, protection, safety, etc.) without acknowledging God as the source of those blessings. Through prayer we acknowledge God in every area of life and in every situation. He is our Father, our Provider, our Protector, our Savior, and our Guide. He is the one to receive honor, glory, and thanksgiving. He is the one who can grant forgiveness and wholeness and peace. So as we develop a life of prayer, we rejoice increasingly in the presence and the promises of God and thank Him for them.

Prayers of Supplication. For some people, prayer seems to be primarily a means of getting something from God. If they need food or drink, they ask God to provide it. If they need wisdom or strength, they ask Him to supply it. If they have a serious disease, they ask God to heal it. If they face a big problem, they ask Him to solve it. If they are in a difficult situation, they ask Him to change it. If they need money, they ask Him to give it. And if they have any other need or desire, they ask Him to take care of it. And that is the extent of their praying. But for the sincere believer, prayer involves so much more than that. We look to the Lord not only for material or physical blessings, but we pray even more earnestly for the spiritual and eternal blessings which He provides. And we ask for these blessings not only so that our own lives will be enriched, but so that God will increasingly be glorified in our own lives and in the lives of all His people.

THE GIFT OF PRAYER

Someone once wrote: “More things are accomplished through prayer than this world dreams of.” And that is almost certainly true. It probably is also true that when we get to heaven, some of us will sincerely regret that we prayed so little while we were on earth. We will then realize how much more fruitful and blessed our lives could have been if we had prayed more earnestly, more frequently, and with greater faith.

At times we may be surprised to see how the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth responds to the simplest prayer. At other times we may be humbled and inspired to see how many wonderful things happen when God’s faithful people pray.

Prayer is far more, of course, than simply asking God for things. Prayer also involves praise, confession, thanksgiving, and much more. Some prayers are not even spoken at all. As one writer put it many years ago:

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, unuttered or expressed,
the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast.
Prayer is the burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear,
the upward glancing of the eye when none but God is near.*

James Montgomery

The blessings of prayer are truly many and great. However, prayer is never a substitute for work. We do not work less because we pray more. As an old Latin phrase (“Ora et Labora”) reminds us, we must both pray and work. We will never be able to achieve anything of lasting value without the blessing of God, but when Christ lives in us and God works through us, we will be able to accomplish much that brings blessing to us and others and also brings praise and honor to God.

There are some things about prayer, of course, that we cannot not fully explain or understand. But even when we face circumstances or situations that go beyond our human understanding, we will still faithfully respond to God’s invitation to come to Him in humble and persevering prayer. Because we trust in His promises and are assured of His love and grace, we will always continue to pray.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THIS COURSE

In Lesson One we will concentrate on two things: (1) God’s gracious invitation to come to Him in prayer, and (2) God’s promises to hear and answer us when we pray.

In Lesson Two we will consider some general questions which often arise in connection with prayer. For example, we will consider whether prayer really makes any difference if God already has a plan for our lives and for the rest of the world.

In Lesson Three we will focus on some of God’s wonderful answers to prayer—particularly as these are recorded in the Bible.

In Lesson Four we will consider the potential “dangers” of answered prayer. It may seem strange even to suggest that there may be dangers when prayers are answered—but there are!

In Lesson Five we will consider the problems that sometimes arise in connection with “unanswered” prayer.

In Lesson Six we will focus on prayers of Praise.

In Lesson Seven we will focus on prayers of Confession.

In Lesson Eight we will focus on prayers of Thanksgiving.

In Lesson Nine we will focus on prayers of Intercession.

In Lesson Ten we will focus on Prayer and Fasting and other matters related to prayer.

GOD INVITES HIS PEOPLE TO PRAY

If the Bible did not assure us that God sincerely invites us to pray and even wants us to pray, we might feel that we are being too bold when we bring our requests and petitions to Him. Since He is the Ruler over the entire universe and is highly exalted above everyone and everything in this world, we might conclude that our own problems and needs are so small that God is not concerned about them.

Thankfully, that is not true. If anything is of concern to us, it is also of concern to God. Nothing is too big and nothing is too small to bring to Him in prayer. Since the Bible tells us that even the hairs of our head are all numbered and that God is concerned about the fall of a lowly sparrow to the ground, He certainly is concerned about the hurts and needs of His children.

READ WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES

Jesus said, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” Matthew 10:29-31

Jesus said, “Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Matthew 6: 31-33

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.” Isaiah 55:6

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.”
Ephesians 6:18

*“Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful?
Let him sing praise.”* James 5:13

GOD PROMISES TO HEAR HIS PEOPLE WHEN THEY PRAY

God knows our deepest longings and understands our most earnest desires. He understands our thoughts even when we are not able to express them. He hears our groanings and feels our sighs. He knows our hurts and sees our tears. He knows when we fall and when we are confused. He understands our fears and our inward pain. He hears our feeblest cries and responds to our most urgent calls. God fully understands exactly what we are going through. In every experience of joy or sorrow, God is there. And in every situation of need or blessing, He is willing and eager to hear our prayers.

GOD HEARS OUR PRAYERS

“Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.” Psalm 4:3

“The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. . . . When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.” Psalm 34:15 and 17

“The LORD is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous.” Proverbs 15:29

“He regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer.” Psalm 102:17

“This is the confidence we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” 1 John 5:14

“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.” 1 Peter 3:12

GOD PROMISES TO ANSWER US WHEN WE PRAY

God not only *hears* our prayers, but He also promises to *answer* them. It’s true that there are some things which may stand in the way of receiving positive answers to our prayers, but in this Lesson we focus on God’s

gracious promises to answer the prayers of all those who come to Him humbly and sincerely.

God's Promises in the Old Testament

“Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.’” Jeremiah 29:11-13

“But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.” Deuteronomy 4:29

“Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.” Isaiah 65:24

“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14

“When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.” Psalm 91:15

“They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’” Zechariah 13:9

Jesus' Promises in the New Testament

“Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” Matthew 21:22

“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” John 14:13-14

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” John 15:7-8

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Luke 11:9-10, 13

“Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” John 16:24

“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” Matthew 18:19

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Mark 11:24

Other Promises in the New Testament

“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.” 1 John 3:21-22

“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.” 1 John 5:14-15

“Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” James 5:13-16

WHOSE PRAYERS WILL GOD ANSWER?

God always responds to the prayers of all those who love and trust Him. Sometimes He may also answer the prayers of those who know very little about Him or who are not living the way He wants them to. At times He may even choose to respond to the cries of those do not love or trust Him or who aren't even sure that He exists!

However, if we are going to have a fruitful, consistent and meaningful prayer life, we must sincerely believe at least three things.

First, we must believe that there truly is a God who genuinely cares about this world and especially about those who love and trust Him.

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:6

Second, we must sincerely believe that God rules over the entire world and that He has the power to do whatever He chooses to do in this world.

“Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”
Psalm 115:3

See also Psalm 135:6 and Ephesians 1:11.

Third, we must believe that God not only knows what is best for us who love and trust Him, but that He also will do what is best for us—whether we fully understand His ways or not.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28

In Lesson Five we will look at some other things that may be considered “requirements” that have to be met before God will answer our prayers. In this Lesson, however, we emphasize God’s promises to answer us. He blesses us primarily because of His mercy and grace and because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has merited for us and not because of who we are or what we have done.

LESSON ONE

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Day 1 GOD LOVES AND CARES FOR HIS PEOPLE

Psalm 9:9-10; Psalm 16:7-11; Psalm 27:1; Psalm 34:18-19; Psalm 50:15; Psalm 55:22; Psalm 56:3-4; Psalm 100:3; Isaiah 43:1-2; Nahum 1:7.

Day 2 GOD INVITES AND ENCOURAGES US TO PRAY

Psalm 105:4; 1 Chronicles 16:11; 1 Peter 5:7; Jeremiah 33:3; Luke 18:1; 1 Timothy 2:8; Colossians 4:2; Philippians 4:6-7.

Day 3 GOD'S PEOPLE HUMBLY ASK GOD TO HEAR THEIR PRAYERS

Psalm 4:1; Psalm 5:2; Psalm 17:6; Psalm 27:7-9; Psalm 31:1-2; Psalm 69:13-18; Psalm 86:6; Psalm 102:1-2.

Day 4 GOD PROMISES TO HEAR OUR PRAYERS

Isaiah 65:24; Deuteronomy 4:29-31; Psalm 34:15-17; Psalm 102:17; 1 John 5:14; Proverbs 15:29; 1 Peter 3:12

Day 5 GOD DOES HEAR OUR PRAYERS

Psalm 6:9; 10:17-18; 18:6; 28:6; 31:21-22; 40:1-3; Psalm 106:44-45; 116:1-2; 145:18-19

Day 6 GOD IS ABLE TO ANSWER OUR PRAYERS

Genesis 18:14; Isaiah 40:28-31; Isaiah 51:12-16; Jeremiah 32:17, 27; Luke 1:35-37; Luke 18:27

Day 7 GOD RESPONDS TO THE PRAYERS OF HIS PEOPLE

2 Chronicles 7:11-16; Psalm 37:4-11; Psalm 37:39-40; Psalm 86:1-7; Psalm 91:14-16



LESSON ONE – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F We may pray to God about anything at any time if we pray thoughtfully and sincerely.
2. T F Jesus said, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”
3. T F In the Book of Psalms we read: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
4. T F Psalm 34:15-18 teaches that “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord will not hear them if they have become unfaithful or disobedient.”
5. T F In Matthew 21 we read: “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”
6. T F When God promises to hear and answer our prayers, there are never any conditions attached to His promises, so we can be confident that we will always receive what we ask for.
7. T F In Matthew 18:19, we read that Jesus said, “If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.”
8. T F In James 5:16 we read that “the prayers of a righteous person are of no greater significance in the sight of God than the prayers of someone who is not righteous, because He is a God of love and grace.”
9. T F Hebrews 11:6 teaches: “Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”
10. T F To the faithful believers in Rome, Paul wrote: “In everything by prayer and supplication . . . let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1. A. God is willing to listen to all our requests and concerns without making a distinction between important things and things that some people would consider to be of little significance.
B. There are some things in our lives which we can handle by ourselves, so we should not bother God about such things.
C. If we are unsure about how to pray to God “in the right way,” it is better not to pray at all.
2. A. Since Jesus was truly God as well as truly human, it was never necessary for Him to pray.
B. In the New Testament we read that Jesus often prayed to His Father in Heaven.
C. Though Jesus did pray often, there are only four specific occasions in the Bible when we read that Jesus prayed.
3. A. Followers of Jesus in the New Testament were careful to pray only in the Temple as God had taught Moses in the Old Testament.
B. The followers of Jesus prayed in many places and in many situations and at many different times.
C. The followers of Jesus never prayed publicly when others could watch them.
4. A. We may pray to the Lord about all our needs and desires—whether big or small.
B. We may pray that God will provide for all our spiritual needs, but it is selfish to pray about material needs or concerns.
C. We may pray for our own specific needs and concerns but we should not pray for the specific needs of others, since we do not know what is in their hearts.
5. A. When we have prayed often about a specific matter and do not receive what we desired or asked for, that is clearly a sign that God does not want us to continue to pray about it.
B. Because we trust in God’s promises and are confident of His love and grace, we should continue to pray about a specific matter unless we are very sure that God no longer wants us to pray about it.
C. We may be very confident that God will either answer our prayers as we ask or He will let us know why He doesn’t answer our prayers in the way we desire.

6. Which of the following passages does NOT explicitly teach that God hears all our prayers?
- A. Psalm 34:15 and 17
 - B. 1 John 5:14
 - C. Isaiah 55:6
7. Which of the following passages does NOT contain a “condition” which must be met if we are to receive an answer to our prayers
- A. Deuteronomy 4:9
 - B. Psalm 37:4
 - C. Zechariah 13:9
8. If we are going to have a fruitful, consistent and meaningful prayer life, we should believe that:
- A. God knows about all our needs and knows what is truly best for us.
 - B. God will never let any harm or significant disappointment come into our life.
 - C. God will clearly explain to us in one way or another why He does what He does.
9. Which of the following passages is NOT found in the Old Testament?
- A. “Whatever you ask for in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”
 - B. “They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’”
 - C. “When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.”
10. A. Our most important prayers are prayers of petition, since they demonstrate that we know we are completely dependent on God for everything.
- B. Prayers of thanksgiving are more significant than prayers of petition since prayers of petition focus on ourselves while prayers of thanksgiving focus on God and all that He has done for us.
 - C. All prayers, including prayers of praise and confession are significant and important and none of them should be considered more important or more significant than others.

LESSON ONE – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Write out your own definition of prayer. Prayer is _____.
2. Many of our prayers are prayers of petition in which we ask God for something.
What other kinds of prayer are there?
3. A. Many passages are listed in this Lesson from the OLD Testament in which God promises to answer prayer. Write out two of these passages which are most special to you personally.
(1)

(2)

B. Why did you choose these two passages?
4. A. Many passages quoted in this Lesson are from the New Testament in which God promises to answer prayer. Write out two of the passages which are most special or significant to you personally.
(1)

(2)

B. Why did you choose these two passages?
5. A. What wonderful promise did God give His people in 2 Chronicles 7:14?
B. Do you think this promise holds true for your own country today also?
Please give the reason for your answer.
6. Read 1 Kings 3:5-15.
A. What did God invite Solomon to pray for in verse 5?
B. What did Solomon ask for?
C. How did God answer Solomon's prayer?
7. According to Matthew 6:31-33, why should we not worry about such things as food and shelter and clothing?
8. Read Jeremiah 29:13 and complete this sentence: "You will seek me and find me when _____."

9. Which of the two following statements represents the Bible's teaching?
Circle A or B.
- A. God graciously answers our prayers because of His mercy and grace and because of what Jesus has merited for us.
- B. God is truly gracious and Jesus has merited many things for us, but we must still keep all God's commandments before He will answer our prayers.
10. Read Luke 11:9-10 and fill in the blanks: "For everyone who asks _____; and the one who seeks _____; and to the one who knocks _____."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Some people say they genuinely believe that God hears and answers prayer, but they pray very little. Why do you think this happens?
2. Some of our "thoughts" are clearly intended to be prayers. This is especially true in our "silent prayers." But not all thoughts are prayers. When do our thoughts become prayers?
3. Evaluate this sentence: "Though God is in control of the world in a general way, there are many specific situations that are beyond His control. We should therefore not pray about such things."
4. Some people aren't sure whether or not there really is a God who hears prayer. Yet, when they call out to Him in distress, God may still hear and answer them. Why do you think God answers them?
5. How would you respond to someone who said: "God gave many wonderful promises concerning prayer in the Bible, but those promises were for people who lived a long time ago. Those people had very little knowledge of medicine, technology or the world in general. Today we don't need God as much as we used to, so we don't need to pray as much as people did in the past."



QUESTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

Lesson Two

PRAYER

Introduction

In the first lesson, we read many passages that teach us that:

- (1) God invites us to pray
- (2) God encourages us to pray
- (3) God hears us when we pray
- (4) God graciously answers us when we pray.

In this lesson we will see that God is ABLE to answer our prayers because He knows all things and controls all things. If God were not truly in control of all things, there would be little reason for us to pray. Why should we pray to someone who is not able to help us or answer us? And why should we pray to someone who doesn't really know what is best for us? God not only knows what is best for us, but He is constantly working out all things for our spiritual and eternal good (Romans 8:28).

But even though we know and believe all this, we might still have some important questions about prayer. For example, we might ask: If God already knows everything about us, why do we have to tell Him about our needs and concerns? Doesn't He already know them? And if He truly has the whole world under His control, why do we have to ask Him to help us? Won't He automatically help His children—whether they ask for His help or not? And if He is a sovereign God who has a divine plan for the world, will He really change that plan just because we pray?

In this lesson we will take a careful look at what the Bible says regarding these questions. We will also look at what the Bible says about some other very practical questions as to when and where and how we should pray.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT THE GOD TO WHOM WE PRAY?

The Bible makes it clear that God knows everything about every person and every thing that exists in this world. He has not only created the world but He continues to uphold the world and all that is in it. The Bible also teaches that God is able to do whatever He chooses to do or desires to do. There is no person or power or spirit or force that can keep God from doing exactly what He wants to do. Further, He is a sovereign God who has an eternal plan for this world and for everyone in it. Moment by moment He controls all that takes place in the world so that His appointed purposes will ultimately be fulfilled.

God's Creation and Control of the World Through His Son Jesus Christ

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1

"For by him (Christ Jesus) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."
Colossians 1:16-17

"[Christ Jesus is] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And (God) put all things under his (Jesus') feet and gave him as head over all things to the church." Ephesians 1:21-22

God's Knowledge of All Things

"And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."
Hebrews 4:13

"The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds." Psalm 33:13-15

“O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.” Psalm 139:1-4

God’s Power to Do Whatever He Wills

“Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”
Psalm 115:3

“Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.” Psalm 135:6

“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?” Jeremiah 32:27

God’s Plan for Individuals and for the World

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”
Jeremiah 29:11

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.” Ephesians 1:11

[Joseph said to his brothers]: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” Genesis 50:20

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT TO KNOW THESE TRUTHS ABOUT GOD

God has made these things known to us for our comfort and encouragement. Since He knows everything about everyone, nothing can take Him by surprise. Since He has all power to do what He chooses, nothing can keep Him from answering our prayers, and nothing will be able to prevent Him from bringing His eternal plan to completion.

Because we know that God is gracious, loving, and just, we know that His plans for His children will always be gracious and loving and just. We can pray to Him with the complete confidence that nothing will take place in our lives or in the world which will be able to undermine His plans and purposes for us.

This does not mean, of course, that we will always fully *understand* the ways of God. Many times we won't. The apostle Paul acknowledged that, too. But Paul could still write with complete confidence and assurance in Romans 8:28: "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*"

ANSWERS TO OTHER QUESTIONS

Why should we tell God about our needs if He already knows them?

First, by bringing our needs and concerns to God in prayer, we recognize and acknowledge that He is the source of every blessing we enjoy. We confess that nothing ultimately comes to us because we earn it or deserve it. And we know that nothing happens by chance.

Every blessing we receive, every ability or talent we have, every pleasure we enjoy, and even every breath we take is ours only because of the mercy and grace of God. When we pray to God and tell Him our needs and ask for His blessing, we confess and acknowledge that He is the ultimate source of every good thing. And we remind ourselves of that as well!

Second, in His wisdom and providence, God has graciously determined to grant us many things simply because we ask for them. He has also determined not to give us some things because we do *not* ask for them! Or, in the words of a very familiar hymn,

“O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.”

God takes our prayers very seriously—so seriously that we sometimes may miss out on a blessing that He is ready and willing to give us but we do not receive it simply because we neglect to pray!

In summary: When we humbly and sincerely bring our needs and desires and concerns to God in prayer,

- (1) we acknowledge that we are totally dependent *on* Him,
- (2) we recognize that we receive all our blessings *from* Him, and
- (3) we sincerely give all praise and honor *to* Him.

Is it true that we will not receive anything from God unless we ask for it?

No. Most of the blessings we receive from the Lord come without our asking for them. Each moment that we are able to see or hear or speak is a blessing from the Lord. When our bodies function normally and we are able to eat and drink and walk and talk and work and play—these are all blessings of the Lord. However, we sometimes forget about that until these blessings are taken away from us or until we see people who do not have them.

People who don't have a home in which to live may earnestly pray for shelter, while we who have a pleasant home may take our home for granted. The same is true with the blessings of clean water, good food, adequate clothing, and a multitude of other things we have enjoyed for so long that we just assume they will always be there.

***Do not neglect to give God thanks
for the blessings you haven't even asked for!***

Will God change His sovereign plans simply because we ask Him to?

There are several important things we must remember in this regard. First, we must believe that God is sincere when He invites us to pray and when He promises to answer our prayers.

*We do not have to figure out exactly how everything fits
together in God's eternal plan before we can pray sincerely.*

We simply have to trust what He promises and obey what He commands. If God tells us that He will answer our prayers, we can be confident that He will!

Second, both the Bible and history demonstrate over and over again that things do change when people pray. God provides healing, rain, victory, wisdom, guidance, peace, protection, security, food and so much more **because people pray**.

Third, we may be confident that God has answers to our questions even though we do not. He is an eternal, infinite, all-knowing God. We are only finite creatures with very limited knowledge and understanding.

Rather than being overly concerned about mysteries that we cannot fully understand, we can rejoice in knowing that our Almighty God graciously makes room in His sovereign plan for our humble and sincere prayers.

By His own intention and design, our prayers do make a significant difference in what happens in this world. Because of that, we may continue to pray in the confidence and expectation that God will definitely hear and answer us when we pray.

As we consider all these things, we may be comforted and encouraged by the words of Isaiah 55:8: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.”*

How should we pray?

We should always pray humbly, honestly, and sincerely — whether we pray privately or in public. And we should also always pray in the name of Jesus. [We will discuss this point at greater length later in the course.]

When we pray we do not need to use special words or a special tone of voice. And we certainly should not pray in a way that seeks to “impress” other people. When we pray, we are speaking to our Father in heaven — not to anyone else. We may be praying for other people, but we are not praying to them.

Jesus said: *“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”* Matthew 6:5-8

Is our “posture” important when we pray?

The Bible does not give us specific directions about what we should do with our bodies when we pray. However, our physical actions often reflect the sincerity of our prayers and the attitude of our hearts. Many people choose to close their eyes when they pray. This helps them focus more directly on God and keeps them from being distracted by things around

them. Others fold their hands for the same reason. Folded or clasped hands also reflect an attitude of “asking” or beseeching God for His favor.

When we bow our heads or get on our knees before God in prayer, we express our humility and unworthiness in His presence. We acknowledge that He is a holy, glorious, and awesome God while we are simple, sinful, and finite creatures.

Some people may bow or kneel before God in prayer simply because of tradition. However, when we bow before Him thoughtfully and sincerely, it is a very appropriate way to approach our great and exalted God.

When we lie prostrate before the Lord in prayer, we demonstrate the intensity of our desires or the greatness of our needs. People who lie with their face to the ground before the Lord in prayer usually do so with the very deep feelings—feelings of unworthiness, repentance, sorrow, or need.

Lifting our hands in prayer helps us focus on our glorious and merciful Father as we reach out to the One who is high and exalted and worthy of all our thanksgiving and praise.

What we do with our bodies when we pray may not be the most important dimension of our prayers. However, those who are careless with their bodies when they pray, fumbling with their hands, roving with their eyes, or slouching with their bodies, show disrespect for God and a lack of reverence, sincerity, and humility before Him.

When should we pray?

At the time the Bible was written, there were specified times when God’s people were expected to come together for prayer. (See, for example, Acts 3:1 and Acts 10:30.) Hours were set aside for prayer at the Temple both in the morning and later in the afternoon.

Most people also prayed at other times.

Some chose to pray by themselves in the morning.

“O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.” Psalm 5:3

Some set aside time at noon for prayer.

“The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.” Acts 10:9

Some focused on praying in the evening.

“Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!” Psalm 141:2

Some spent time each morning, afternoon and evening in prayer.

“Daniel . . . went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.” Daniel 6:10

Already in the Old Testament there were situations and times when people meditated or prayed or cried out to the Lord day and night.

“I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.” Psalm 6:6

“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water . . . when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night.” Psalm 63:1, 6

The same situation was true in the New Testament.

“We pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith.”
1 Thessalonians 3:10

“[Anna] did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.” Luke 2:37

“She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.”
1 Timothy 5:5

Jesus Himself often prayed early in the morning and also, at times, throughout the night.

“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”
Mark 1:35

“In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.” Luke 6:12

Where should we pray?

In Old Testament times and in the early years of the New Testament, the Temple in Jerusalem was known as a “house of prayer” (Isaiah 56:7 and Matthew 21:13). God specifically designated the Temple as the central place where sacrifices were to be brought and where prayers were to be offered (1 Kings 8:29-30).

However, in both the Old and New Testaments, believers also prayed wherever they happened to be. There were no limits whatsoever as to where people could pray. They prayed in their homes, they prayed on the battlefield, they prayed in their fields, they prayed along the way, they prayed on the rooftop, they prayed in their “closet,” they prayed in prison . . . and they prayed whenever their hearts moved them to seek the Lord or bring Him praise.

The people of Israel were surely encouraged by the words of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 4:7: *“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?”*

One of the special blessings we have as believers is that our God is ready and willing to hear our prayers at any time, in any place, in any situation, about any subject, and under any circumstances. Neither time nor place nor posture is ultimately of major significance. The Lord is both willing and eager to hear the earnest and fervent prayer of every one who earnestly and humbly seeks Him.

We may still have some lingering questions about the subject of prayer, but none of those questions should ever keep us from coming into the glorious presence of our gracious God in sincere and humble faith that He will hear and answer us when we pray.

LESSON TWO

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- Day 1 PRAYING IN THE TEMPLE
1 Kings 8:22-53
- Day 2 PRAYING TO A SOVEREIGN GOD
2 Samuel 7:18-29
- Day 3 PRAYING WITH TRUST IN GOD'S PROMISES
Psalm 119:49-64
- Day 4 PRAYING WITH A LONGING FOR GOD
Psalm 42 and Psalm 43
- Day 5 PRAYING IN THE MIDST OF CONFUSION AND
UNCERTAINTY
Psalm 44
- Day 6 PRAYING TO A POWERFUL AND ALMIGHTY GOD
Isaiah 37:14-20
- Day 7 PRAYING WITH PASSION AND ANTICIPATION
Isaiah 38:9-20



LESSON TWO – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Since God already knows everything about us, it is neither necessary nor desirable to tell Him about our needs.
2. T F God knows about all our actions, but it's possible for us to have hidden secrets in our hearts that He does not know about.
3. T F Since God is a God of love, He will never permit anything to come into our lives that would cause us sorrow or suffering or pain.
4. T F Since God is all-powerful, nothing can keep Him from answering our prayers in the way He Himself chooses.
5. T F God sometimes does not give us what we desire simply because we do not ask Him.
6. T F Nothing will be changed through our prayers because God has already determined exactly what will happen.
7. T F At times we should pray to saints or other notable persons who have died, since they are much closer to God than we are.
8. T F Although there is no required "posture" that we should have when we pray, our posture in prayer is significant.
9. T F It is acceptable to pray to God no matter where we are or what we are doing.
10. T F We can pray to God with complete confidence that no one will ultimately be able to destroy or undermine His plans and purposes for our lives.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1.
 - A. Since God will always do what is best for us, we should not spend a lot of valuable time in prayer asking Him for anything.
 - B. Since God knows all our needs, there is no need for us to tell Him about them.
 - C. Though God knows everything and does want what is best for us, many things in our lives take place because we pray.
2.
 - A. Satan is a powerful enemy and we should faithfully pray that God will deliver us from his snares and temptations.
 - B. Since Jesus took away Satan's power when He died on the cross, Satan no longer has any significant influence on Christians.
 - C. Satan knows he is defeated, so he focuses most of his attacks on non-believers rather than on Christians.
3.
 - A. Every blessing we enjoy is ours because of the mercy and grace of God.
 - B. Most of the blessings we enjoy are ours because we have specifically asked God for them.
 - C. Most of the blessings we enjoy are ours because we have faithfully and diligently worked for them.
4.
 - A. God is often "tired" of hearing us pray for the same things all the time.
 - B. God never gets tired of hearing the sincere and humble prayers of His faithful people.
 - C. God wants us to stop praying about something after we have earnestly prayed about it and received no answer.
5.
 - A. In general, we will not receive any blessings from God unless we humbly and sincerely ask for them.
 - B. We receive many blessings from God without asking for them.
 - C. We will receive no blessings from God unless we are living a holy and obedient life.
6.
 - A. It is important for us to understand fully everything God has revealed to us in His Word before we can pray meaningfully.
 - B. There will often be things we do not fully understand about God and His ways, but that should not keep us from praying.
 - C. Since we cannot fully understand everything in the Bible or in our own lives, we will always wonder how we should pray about most things.

7.
 - A. If God is truly sovereign over all things, we will never be able to “change” anything through our prayers.
 - B. The Bible teaches that things do “happen” in response to our prayers—whether or not we can completely understand how.
 - C. We may *think* that our prayers “change” things, but they really don’t.
8.
 - A. We should usually use a “special” tone of voice when we pray to indicate that we are praying humbly and sincerely.
 - B. We should use “special” words when we pray to indicate that we are praying to God and not simply talking to human beings.
 - C. We should not use special words or a special tone of voice to impress either People or God when we pray.
9.
 - A. If we pray at the same time each day, praying will likely become little more than a habit.
 - B. It is often very helpful to pray at approximately the same time each day, so that we include prayer as a significant part of each day’s activities.
 - C. It is good to pray frequently, but it does not matter very much whether or not we actually pray every day.
10.
 - A. Our posture when we pray is totally irrelevant.
 - B. Our posture when we pray is often very significant.
 - C. God looks only upon our heart when we pray and is not at all concerned whether we bow, kneel, sit, or stand.

LESSON TWO – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- Which of the following statements best represents what the Bible teaches? Circle A or B or C.
 - God knows everything that has happened in the past and everything that is happening now, but most things in the future are unknown to Him.
 - God knows all about us except for those things that we are able to keep hidden from Him in the depths of our mind and heart.
 - God knows everything about everyone.
- Write out a Bible verse which supports your answer to question 1.
- Read Psalm 115:3 and complete this sentence: "Our God is in the heavens; _____."
- Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
"No one can really pray with confidence or assurance until he has found answers to all his questions concerning prayer."
 - Please give the reason for your answer.
- How does the story of Joseph in the Old Testament illustrate the truth of Romans 8:28? (See especially Genesis 50:15-21.)
- What does Ephesians 1:11 teach us about God?
- Which of the following statements is NOT true? Circle A or B or C or D.
 - God is sincere when He invites us to pray and promises to answer our prayers.
 - If we do not fully understand God's will in a specific matter, it is better for us to stop praying about it.
 - Our prayers are somehow included in the eternal plan of God.
 - Many things in the Bible happened because people prayed about them.
- Write out two scripture passages that refer to praying all night.
 -
 -
- What would you say to someone who says: "I am not going to pray because God already knows everything that I need"?

10. A. Do you think that we probably miss out on some blessings because we fail to pray?
B. Write out a Scripture verse which supports your answer.
C. Can you think of any specific examples from your own experience where you or others may have forfeited a blessing because of a failure to pray?
11. Evaluate this sentence: "The only blessings we will receive are those we ask for."
12. A. Do you think our "posture" is important when we pray?
B. Please explain your answer.
13. What "posture" did people have when praying in the following situations?
A. 1 Kings 8:54
B. Genesis 24:26
C. Daniel 6:10
D. Luke 22:41
E. Judges 21:2
F. Luke 18:11
G. Acts 9:40
H. 2 Chronicles 20:5-13
I. Numbers 20:6
J. Acts 7:60
14. Read Exodus 17:10-13.
A. What happened when Moses lifted his hands in prayer to God?
B. What happened when his hands were not lifted up?
C. What do you think the Lord was trying to teach Moses and the others through this?
15. Read Matthew 6:6.
A. Where did Jesus tell people to go when they prayed?
B. Do you think Jesus was here teaching that we should always pray in secret?
C. Please give the reason for your answer. If possible, add a Scripture verse to support your answer.
16. A. Can you think of any time or place or situation when you should not pray?
B. Please explain your answer.

17. A. What did Daniel do when he was told not to pray to God for a while?
See Daniel 6:10.
- B. What can we learn from Daniel's example?
18. A. According to Mark 1:35 and Luke 6:12, when did Jesus pray to His Father?
- B. What can we learn from Jesus in this regard?
19. A. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and complete the sentence: "Pray _____."
- B. What do you think Paul means by this?
20. A. Is it possible to pray without being genuinely sincere and humble?
- B. Can you think of any times or situations when people did pray insincerely or without humility?
- C. Why are sincerity and humility important when we pray?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. A. Do you think one of the reasons some people pray so little is because they have some sincere questions about the value of prayer?
- B. Do you think some people use their questions or concerns simply as an "excuse" for not spending more time in prayer?
- C. Please explain your answers.
2. How would you respond to someone who says: "I don't pray because God has already determined everything that is going to happen, so my prayers won't make any difference"?
3. A. How important do you think it is to have a "set time" for prayer each day?
- B. How important is it to have a "specific place" where you regularly pray?
4. What difference would it make in your prayer life if you believed that God did *not* have absolute power over everything?
5. A. Are there any questions in your own mind and heart which make it difficult for you to pray? Please share them if appropriate.
- B. Have you found any teachings in this Lesson that have been particularly helpful to you in your prayer life? Please explain.

ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Lesson Three

PRAYER

Introduction

The Bible gives us many stories about the wonderful ways God answered the prayers of His people. Battles were won, lives were spared, people were transformed, sick people were healed, demons were cast out, children were born, the blind were given sight, the deaf were made to hear, people who had died were raised to life, grieving people were comforted, confused people were given wisdom, perplexed people were given knowledge, and many others were blessed by a special touch of God's grace.

These stories encourage us. When we read about those answers to prayer in the past, we become all the more eager to bring our own petitions and requests to the Lord. Even if some of our own prayers do not seem to be answered right away, we will still continue to pray as we remember those times when God mercifully and graciously answered the prayers of others.

We must also remember, of course, that God sometimes answers prayers with a "No" or "Not now" or "Not yet." At other times, He may choose to give us even more than we ask or hope for. But whatever the answer may be, we may be assured that God always hears and responds to the humble and honest prayers of His faithful people.

When we read about God's answers to prayer in the Bible, we are reminded that God is genuinely concerned about *every* aspect of our lives. He is concerned about our health, our finances, our work, our play, our relationships, our minds and our hearts. There is nothing of concern to us that is not also of concern to Him.

But we should not forget that God is more concerned about our spiritual well-being than anything else. If He always gave us exactly what we asked for, we might become boastful or proud or begin to focus too much on the material or physical side of life.

God's primary interest is not that we become materially rich or physically healthy. Rather, His main desire is that we learn to love Him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and that we love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39).

God wants us to trust Him and love Him, to praise and adore Him, and to serve and obey Him in every area of our lives. And He desires that we increasingly become more like Jesus (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Though He delights in bringing us joy and peace and happiness and often showers us with earthly blessings of many kinds, His primary interest is not in our physical or material well-being or our earthly pleasures.

When God responds positively to our prayers, therefore, He graciously does so in ways that enable us to become fruitful and obedient servants who bring glory to His name and bring blessing to others as we become more like Jesus.

In this Lesson we will look at some of the wonderful answers to prayer that are found in the Bible. By reflecting on these answers, we will be encouraged to pray with increasing confidence, humility, and gratitude.

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR PROSPERITY AND SUCCESS

The three examples of answered prayer which are given here are all from the Old Testament. The followers of Jesus in the New Testament rarely prayed specifically for riches or for material prosperity and Jesus never emphasized them in His teaching or by His example. Even so, Jesus did clearly teach that God does provide for the needs of those who look to Him for their daily needs.

"Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!' And God granted what he asked." 1 Chronicles 4:10

"As long as he [Uzziah] sought the Lord, God made him prosper." 2 Chronicles 26:5

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR VICTORY

The verses cited here are from the Old Testament at a time when God's people were at war or oppressed by their enemies.

“When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. . . . And Moses said to the people, ‘Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today.’” Exodus 14:10, 13

(Read Exodus 14: 15-28 to see the great victory the Lord gave them.)

On one occasion Moses prayed to the Lord with his hands held up toward heaven and God gave the people a great victory over the Amalekites. *Exodus 17:8-13*

“[Their enemies] were given into their hands, for they cried out to God in the battle, and he granted their urgent plea because they trusted in him.” 1 Chronicles 5:20

“The battle was in front of and behind them. And they cried to the Lord . . . and God gave them into their hand . . . because they relied on the Lord, the God of their fathers.” 2 Chronicles 13:14-18

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR WISDOM OR GUIDANCE

It is always appropriate for us to pray for guidance from the Lord and to ask for wisdom as we make decisions or as we seek to know how best to proceed in any situation.

Daniel prayed: *“To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.” Daniel 2:23*

Gideon prayed to the Lord for guidance and for confirmation that the Lord had really called him to lead the people of Israel. God answered Gideon's prayer in a miraculous way. See Judges 6:36-40.

The early Christians often prayed to the Lord for special guidance as they made significant decisions regarding leadership in the early church.

“And they prayed and said, ‘You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ’ . . . And they cast lots

for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” Acts 1:24-26

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” Acts 13:2-3

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR SAFETY OR PROTECTION

David and Elisha and Nehemiah were all significant spiritual leaders of God’s people in the Old Testament. However, each one of them was also involved in physical conflicts with the enemies of Israel. Most Christian leaders today are not directly involved in physical warfare in the way Old Testament leaders were, but many individual Christians serve in their country’s battles and need God’s protection just as the people of Israel did. In addition, in many countries today Christians are often the object of persecution. Believers in these countries cry out to God for His protecting grace just as people did in the Old Testament.

David said, *“In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I called. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry came to his ears.”* 2 Samuel 22:7

(See the amazing account of God’s response to David’s prayer in verses 8-51.)

When Elisha was surrounded by enemies, he said to his servant:

“Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ Then Elisha prayed and said, ‘O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.’ So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” 2 Kings 6:16-17

When Nehemiah was involved with the rebuilding of the wall around the city of Jerusalem, he faced strong opposition from the enemies of God’s people.

“And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. . . . When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work.” Nehemiah 4:8-9, 15

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR DELIVERANCE

When the people of Israel were living in Egypt, the Egyptians made slaves of them and placed heavy burdens on them.

“The people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” Exodus 2:23-24

When the people of Israel in Jerusalem were surrounded by their powerful enemies from Assyria, they cried out to the Lord their God for help. God responded to them with these words:

“‘Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria . . . I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.’” Isaiah 37:21, 35

(Read Isaiah 37:36-37 to see how God delivered His people from their enemies.)

In the New Testament we read about Paul and Silas and Peter who, on different occasions, had been put in prison because of their faithful ministry.

“Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.” Acts 12:5

(Read Acts 12:6-12 to see how God answered their prayer.)

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.” Acts 16:25-26

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR HEALING

The Lord frequently answered prayers which people offered for themselves or for others who needed healing from physical afflictions. Most of the examples presented here are prayers which were offered for the healing of others rather than for the person who was praying. The one exception to that is Hezekiah’s prayer for healing after God had told him that he was going to die.

“Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.” Genesis 20:17-18

“And the king said to the man of God, ‘Entreat now the favor of the Lord your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me.’ And the man of God entreated the Lord.” 1 Kings 13:6

“Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death, and he prayed to the Lord, and he answered him and gave him a sign.”
2 Chronicles 32:24

(See Isaiah 38:2-6 for God’s wonderful response to Hezekiah’s prayer.)

“It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.”
Acts 28:8-9

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR THE BIRTH OF CHILDREN

“And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.”
Genesis 25:21

“God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.” Genesis 30:17

“Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son.” Genesis 30:22-23

Hannah, the mother of Samuel, said, *“‘For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him.’”* 1 Samuel 1:27

“The angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.’” Luke 1:13

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR FOOD AND DRINK

When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they often suffered

from a lack of food and water. Again and again they complained to Moses because of their hunger and thirst. Moses brought their needs to God in prayer, but the people of Israel rarely expressed thanks to Moses for praying or to God for answering Moses' prayers!

"The people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?' And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet." Exodus 15:24-25

God also provided His people with both manna and quail to eat, even though their "petition" took the form of repeated grumbling rather than humble and sincere petition. Exodus 16: 1-36

On more than one occasion God provided His people with water from a rock after the people complained and Moses cried out to the Lord in prayer. Exodus 17:1-7

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR A MIRACLE

The Lord often provided miracles in response to the prayers of His people in both the Old and the New Testaments.

"Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. And the Lord did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained." Exodus 8:30-31

"[Elijah] stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again.' And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived." 1 Kings 17:21-22

"Elijah the prophet came near and said, '. . . Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back .' Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." 1 Kings 18:36-38

(See 1 Kings 18:39 for the response of the people to this miracle!)

"Earnest prayer was made for [Peter] to God by the church. . . ." and Peter was miraculously set free (Acts 12:5-17).

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

In the book of Acts, we learn that the early church prayed faithfully and fervently and was richly blessed spiritually. See, for example, Acts 1:14; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 2:42-47.

“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” Acts 4:31

Paul wrote to the believers in Colossae: *“We always thank God when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.” Colossians 1:3-4*
(See also Colossians 1:4-14.)

To the believers in Thessalonica Paul wrote: *“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering . . . your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3*

Paul then continued to mention the other spiritual blessings that were taking place because of the faithfulness of the believers there. (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10)

In his second letter to the same church Paul wrote: *“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers . . . because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.” 2 Thessalonians 1:3*

To the Christians in Philippi, he wrote: *“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.” Philippians 1:3-5*

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR OTHER BLESSINGS

Moses replied [to Pharaoh], *“As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s.” Exodus 9:29*

“And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying

parts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down.” Numbers 11:1-2

Moses said, “I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the Lord bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me that time also. And the Lord was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him. And I prayed for Aaron also at the same time.” Deuteronomy 9:19-20

Moses said, “I lay prostrate before the Lord for these forty days and forty nights, because the Lord had said he would destroy you. And I prayed to the Lord, ‘O Lord God, do not destroy your people and your heritage, whom you have redeemed through your greatness, whom you have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’” Deuteronomy 9:25-26

(God answered Moses’ prayer and spared the lives of His people.)

SUMMARY

Throughout the Bible we read how men and women reached out to God in fervent, earnest, and persevering prayer and how God answered in wonderful, exciting, and miraculous ways. As they humbled themselves before God and laid hold of His promises, they experienced His power and grace in ways that glorified the Lord and brought great blessing to themselves and others. Truly, the God of the Bible is a loving and gracious Father as well as a majestic and Sovereign Lord. He cares deeply about His people and His ears are open to their cries. Though His people were often disobedient and even ungrateful, His loving heart was mercifully responsive to their earnest prayers.

LESSON THREE

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Day 1 GOD ANSWERS PRAYERS FOR DELIVERANCE

Exodus 14:10, 13-14; Psalm 18:6; Psalm 28:6-7; Psalm 34:4-7;
Psalm 91:14-15; Psalm 106:44; Acts 12:11-12.

Day 2 GOD ANSWERS PRAYER FOR HEALING OR NEW LIFE

Numbers 12:10-15; 1 Kings 13:6; 1 Kings 17:19-23;
2 Chronicles 32:24; Acts 5:12-16; Acts 9:40-41; James 5:15.

Day 3 GOD ANSWERS PRAYER TO PROVIDE RELIEF

Exodus 8:9-15; Exodus 8:30-31; Exodus 9:29, 33;
Exodus 10:17-19; Numbers 11:1-2; Numbers 21:6-9.

Day 4 GOD ANSWERS PRAYERS IN TIMES OF SPECIAL NEED

Genesis 32:9-12 (and Genesis 33:4); Judges 16:28-30;
2 Samuel 15:31ff; 2 Samuel 21:14; Ezra 7:27-28;
Nehemiah 4: 8-9, 15; 2 Chronicles 33:12-13; 2 Kings 6:18.

Day 5 GOD ANSWERS PRAYERS FOR DAILY NEEDS

Genesis 28:20-22; Exodus 15:24-27; Psalm 65:2, 5-13;
see 1 Kings 17:1-16.

Day 6 GOD ANSWERS PRAYERS FOR WISDOM AND GUIDANCE

Genesis 24:12-15; 1 Samuel 14:41; 1 Kings 3:9; Ezra 8:21-23;
Nehemiah 1:11 and 2:4-8; Acts 1:14-26.

Day 7 GOD ANSWERS PRAYERS FOR MERCY AND GRACE

Psalm 6:9-10; Psalm 28:6-9; Psalm 40:1-3; Psalm 57:1-3;
Psalm 106:44-48; Psalm 116:1-14; Isaiah 55:6-7; Zechariah
10:1-2, 6-12.



LESSON THREE – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F When the people of Israel prayed in Old Testament times, there were relatively few answers to prayer because Jesus had not yet come.
2. T F Most of the answers to prayer in the Old Testament were related to “spiritual” concerns rather than physical or material things.
3. T F If we sincerely and humbly pray to the Lord, He will never answer our request with a “No.”
4. T F If God always gave us everything we asked for, that might not be good for us.
5. T F God is concerned about everything that happens in our lives.
6. T F God’s primary purpose in answering our prayers is to make our lives more comfortable.
7. T F God answered King Manasseh’s prayers because of his faithfulness when he was young.
8. T F Nehemiah 4 is a good example of what is meant by the saying “Pray and Work.”
9. T F God not only healed King Hezekiah but He also gave him a miraculous sign.
10. T F God gave the people manna and quail to eat, even though they did a lot of grumbling.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1. In Exodus 9 we read that Moses prayed that God would silence the thunder and the hail so that:
 - A. Pharaoh would know that the earth is the LORD’S.
 - B. The people of Israel would be set free from their fear of the storms.
 - C. The people of Egypt would no longer have to suffer from the frightening storms.
2. In 2 Samuel 24 we read that after David sacrificed to the Lord and after he prayed:
 - A. The Lord forgave the people for their sins.
 - B. God stopped the plague He had sent on the people of Israel.
 - C. The people praised and thanked God for their deliverance.

3. In Isaiah 37 God said that He would defend the city and save it because:
 - A. The people prayed.
 - B. The King humbled himself and prayed for deliverance.
 - C. The people confessed their sins and offered sacrifices to the Lord.
4. Each of the following women was able to bear a child in answer to prayer except for:
 - A. Elizabeth
 - B. Hannah
 - C. Mary
5. In Exodus 2 when the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried to the Lord:
 - A. God reminded them that their misery came as punishment for their sins.
 - B. God remembered His covenant with Abraham and was concerned about them.
 - C. God immediately set them free from their bondage.
6. In 1 Kings 18 Elijah prayed that the LORD would answer his prayer so that:
 - A. The people would have the freedom to offer public sacrifices to the LORD without fear.
 - B. The people would be relieved from their terrible suffering.
 - C. The people would know that the LORD was truly God.
7. When Moses prayed to the Lord (Deuteronomy 9):
 - A. He lay prostrate before the Lord for forty days and forty nights.
 - B. He spent many hours talking to the Lord describing the needs of the people.
 - C. He spent one entire week humbly confessing his own sins and the sins of the people.
8. In Acts 4, after the people prayed, which one of the following did not take place?
 - A. The meeting place was shaken.
 - B. The people were all filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - C. The people were freed from the Roman authorities.

9. In Exodus 17 after Moses cried out to the Lord for water to drink:
 - A. God sent torrential rains to meet the needs of the people and their cattle.
 - B. God satisfied the terrible thirst of the people without even sending any water.
 - C. God provided the people with water from a rock in the desert.
10. Which of the following statements best represents the Bible's teaching?
 - A. God is not very much concerned about our physical or material needs, since our spiritual needs are far more important to Him.
 - B. Since God is loving and gracious, He will almost always grant us everything we humbly and sincerely ask of Him.
 - C. God is most concerned about our spiritual well-being, but He is also very concerned about our physical and material needs.

LESSON THREE – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. According to the Lesson notes, what is God's **primary** purpose in answering our prayers?
2. What was so special about God's "answer" to the people in Exodus 16:1-36?
3. In what ways was the healing of King Hezekiah especially remarkable? See Isaiah 38:1-5.
4. Which one of the following things did Jabez not pray for in 1 Chronicles 4?
 - A. "Help my children to always walk in your ways."
 - B. "Bless me and enlarge my territory."
 - C. "Keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain."
5. How did God answer King Asa's prayer for help? (See 2 Chronicles 14:12-15.)
6. How did the Lord answer Samuel's cry for help in 1 Samuel 7:10-12?
7. When Daniel asked God for wisdom, how did God answer him? See Daniel 2:19-23.
8. When Elisha was surrounded by his enemies, how did God protect him? See 2 Kings 6:16-17.
9. According to Isaiah 37:21, why did God defend the city of Jerusalem and save His people from the Assyrians?
10. How did God answer Hezekiah's prayer? (See Isaiah 37:36-37.)

11. List five women in the Bible who were able to have children in answer to prayer.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
 - E.
12. Read 2 Samuel 12:7-16.
 - A. How did God “answer” David’s prayer for his child in 2 Samuel 12:16?
 - B. Why did God respond to David’s prayer the way He did? See 2 Samuel 12:14.
13. In Acts 4:31 what happened after the people prayed?
14. How did God answer Paul’s prayer in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10?
15. How did God answer the earnest prayers of the church for Peter in Acts 12:1-17?
16. What great miracle was Elijah able to perform after he cried out to the Lord? See 1 Kings 17:21-22.
17.
 - A. What does James 5:17 tell us about Elijah?
 - B. What two great miracles took place through Elijah’s prayers? James 5:17-18
18. In 1 Kings 18:36-38 Elijah prayed to the Lord for a great miracle. Why did he ask God for this miracle? He said, “Answer me, O Lord, so _____
_____.”
19. According to Deuteronomy 9:19-20, what great blessing did Moses bring about through his prayers?
20. List five answers to prayer in the Old Testament which you find especially significant. Then indicate WHY you chose each one.
 - A. The answer to prayer:
Why is this answer to prayer especially significant for you?
 - B. The answer to prayer:
Why is this answer to prayer especially significant for you?
 - C. The answer to prayer:
Why is this answer to prayer especially significant for you?

D. The answer to prayer:

Why is this answer to prayer especially significant for you?

E. The answer to prayer:

Why is this answer to prayer especially significant for you?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. When you read about the many remarkable answers to prayer in the Bible, how does this affect your own prayer life? Are you encouraged? Discouraged? Inspired? Humbled?
2. What would you say to someone who insists that God has never answered any of his or her prayers?
3. As you read about some of the answers to prayer in the Old Testament, which person(s) stand out in your mind as a person (or persons) of exceptional power in prayer?
4. Have there been any unusual or special answers to prayer in your own life? Do you expect that there will be other special answers to your prayers in the future? If there have not been any special answers to your prayers, can you think of any reasons for that?
5. Have there been any times in your life when you were confident that God was going to give you what you asked for, but He didn't? If so, how did this affect your prayer life?
6. If God gave you everything you asked for, do you think that would be "good" for you?
If not, why do you pray for things that might not be good for you?
7. Have you ever asked God for something and then later were glad that He did not answer your request?
8. What kinds of things do you seem to focus on most frequently or most earnestly in your prayers? Physical concerns? Spiritual matters? Material things? Personal relationships? The needs of others? Do you feel that you have an appropriate balance in your prayers of petition?
9. When you ask the Lord for something and you do not see an answer to your prayer fairly soon, do you assume that God will not grant what you ask and stop praying about it? How do you know when you should stop asking for something?
10. Does God answer most of your prayer requests in the way you desire? If not, how does this affect your prayer life?

AFTER THE ANSWER

Lesson Four

PRAYER

Introduction

All of us are grateful when God answers our fervent prayers. Those answers encourage us and bless us and assure us that our God is truly loving and powerful and gracious. But if we do not stay spiritually alert, those same answers can result in some significant new problems or temptations for us.

That may sound strange, but it's true. After God grants us a great blessing in answer to our prayers, we may assume that all our major problems and concerns are now behind us. After we win a great victory over temptation, we may feel that we will no longer be overcome by any of our weaknesses. After we reach some new spiritual heights, we may feel confident that we will never slip back again. After we receive something we earnestly prayed for, we may feel that we will never again be in need. And as a result of all these blessings, we may begin to focus too much on the past while neglecting or minimizing the new challenges and temptations of the present.

It's good to remember God's answers of yesterday, but those answers are not sufficient for today's needs—no matter how wonderful those answers may have been. Today will have challenges and needs and cares of its own. Though we are grateful when we remember what God did in the past, we must never forget that we need Him again today as much as we ever did.

Christian living is not a matter of achieving a few big victories in answer to prayer. It involves a daily, faithful walk with God until the last step of life is taken and the last obstacle is overcome. In sports terms, it's more like a hurdle race with its continuous

challenges than a pole vault with its challenge to reach a wonderful new high. Or, to use another example, it's more like a long, demanding marathon rather than a brief, exhilarating sprint.

Thankfully, many believers realize this and live and pray accordingly. But not *everyone* does. Even some of the greatest people in the Bible failed to trust or obey the Lord at one time or another. Many began exceptionally well but failed miserably before they reached the end of their journey. And many of their failures came after some wonderful answers to their prayers.

In this Lesson we will consider ten possible dangers or challenges that may arise AFTER God has graciously answered our prayers. Each one of those dangers will be illustrated by a specific story in the Bible.

(1) *The Danger of Pride: The Story of King Hezekiah* **Isaiah 37-39**

Hezekiah was one of the best kings that the Kingdom of Judah ever had. He was truly a man of God who knew and loved the Lord. He turned the people of Judah back to the ways of God after his own wicked father, Ahaz, had led the people away from God (2 Chronicles 28:24-27; 29:1-11).

Hezekiah experienced many answers to prayer, but there were some exceptional answers at two critical times in his life. One of them involved the people of Judah, the city of Jerusalem, and the Temple of Solomon.

While Hezekiah was serving as king over Judah, the Assyrians were the most powerful nation on earth. They had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and were now intent on capturing Jerusalem and taking the people of Judah captive (2 Chronicles 32:1). Hezekiah knew that in his own strength he was no match for the powerful Assyrian king. If God didn't intervene, the people would surely be defeated and the city would be destroyed.

So what did Hezekiah do? He went up to the temple of the Lord and prayed. He prayed very earnestly that the Lord would rescue and deliver His people for His own honor and glory (Isaiah 37:14-20). And because Hezekiah prayed as he did (Isaiah 37:21), God miraculously answered his prayer by killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers during the night, thereby

saving His people from death and saving Jerusalem from destruction (Isaiah 37:33-37).

A second miraculous answer to Hezekiah's prayers is described in Isaiah 38. At that time Hezekiah himself was ill—deathly ill. In fact, God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that he was going to die (Isaiah 38:1-2). But Hezekiah poured out his heart in fervent prayer to God and begged Him to spare his life (Isaiah 38:2-3). God answered that prayer in a truly miraculous way. Not only was Hezekiah restored to health, but God also assured him that he would live at least fifteen more years (Isaiah 38:4-6).

By this time Hezekiah was in an exceptionally comfortable position. His enemies were destroyed, his kingdom was secure, the Temple was preserved, and Hezekiah himself was healthy, rich and assured of at least fifteen more years of life (2 Chronicles 32:27-29).

So what did he do?

He became proud instead of humble. He focused on himself instead of focusing on God. He became wealthy in material things but became poor spiritually. He missed altogether the opportunity of bringing glory and praise to God when foreign dignitaries asked about the things that had happened to him (2 Chronicles 32:31; Isaiah 39). God's wonderful answers to Hezekiah's prayers had left him proud and over-confident. Though he thought he was strong, he had become weak. Though he felt invincible, he had become vulnerable. He had honored God in his time of weakness (2 Chronicles 32:7-8), but he dishonored Him in his time of victory (2 Chronicles 32:25).

Hezekiah later repented of his pride, and the Lord forgave him. But the Lord also punished Hezekiah for his sin. (See 2 Chronicles 32:24-25, 31; Isaiah 39:5-7.)

Hezekiah's biggest problem was not the power of the king of Assyria or his own serious illness. God could easily take care of both of those problems—and He did. Hezekiah's biggest problem was his own pride after God graciously answered his prayers. And when he faced that problem, he neglected to pray—and his fall was great.

*God graciously answers our prayers
so that we can glorify Him
and not ourselves.*

(2) *The Danger of Self-Pity: The Story of Elijah*

1 Kings 17-19

The prophet Elijah was one of the greatest and most important people in the entire Old Testament. He was the only person (besides Enoch) who was taken to heaven without dying (2 Kings 2:11). He was also one of two Old Testament people who were present at Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain in Israel (Matthew 17:1-3). And Elijah is cited in the New Testament as one of the greatest examples of the power of prayer in the entire Old Testament (James 5:17-18).

Elijah experienced one miracle after another in his life. He was fed by divinely-guided ravens, he lived for months with a widow and her son on just a little oil and a little flour, he brought back to life a child who had died, he dried up the heavens for three and a half years, and later he prayed for rain and brought down a flood of waters on the earth. On Mt. Carmel he experienced the greatest victory of his entire life over the pagan god Baal and 450 of his prophets. After God miraculously answered his prayer for fire to consume the sacrifice he had prepared, Elijah confidently called the people of Israel back to the worship of the one true God. (See 1 Kings 17 and 18.)

But it was only one day after this tremendous victory on Mt. Carmel that Elijah was brought to his knees—not in prayer, but in defeat. When the wicked queen Jezebel threatened to kill him, Elijah did not turn to the God who had demonstrated his great power on the mountain. Rather, he ran away and asked God to take away his life rather than rescue and protect it (1 Kings 19:1-5).

In his tiredness and in his weakness, Elijah focused on himself rather than on God. He focused on his own weakness rather than on God's power. He just did not want to fight the Lord's battles anymore. He felt extremely sorry for himself and simply gave up.

God was still very gracious to Elijah, giving him food and drink and protection when he didn't even ask for it (1 Kings 19:5-9). But God also had to confront him about his greatest failure which came right after his greatest victory (1 Kings 19:9-18).

*When you face opposition in your service for God,
look to Him with expectation
rather than looking inward
in despair.*

(3) *The Danger of Forgetfulness: The Story of Solomon* **2 Kings Chapters 3, 8-11**

Shortly after Solomon became king over God's people, God promised to give him whatever he asked. Solomon humbly asked God for wisdom so that he could rule God's people wisely. In response, God not only gave Solomon exceptional wisdom, He also gave him exceptional riches. There was no one in the entire Old Testament who was as rich or as wise as King Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-15).

Solomon also had the special privilege of building a Temple for the Lord—something that not even King David was permitted to do (1 Kings 5-8). At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon offered a beautiful, solemn, humble prayer to Almighty God, and God responded with the promise of wonderful blessings (1 Kings 8:22-61 and 9:1-9).

Few people in the Old Testament were favored as highly as Solomon was. He had unprecedented knowledge, exceptional wisdom, uncountable riches and was faithful in his walk with God. He had everything his mind or his heart or his eyes desired (see Ecclesiastes 2:1-10). He wrote poems and proverbs and wise sayings which were recorded in the sacred Scriptures. People came from all over the world to hear about his wisdom and to feast their eyes on his wealth. All who came to see him were amazed. Many, like the Queen of Sheba, returned to their homes after visiting Solomon and were convinced that “the half had not been told them” (1 Kings 4:29-34; 10:1-29).

But when Solomon grew older, he seemed to forget all these things. He forgot that everything he had was a blessing from God. He forgot that God alone was entitled to receive the honor and glory for the blessings he had received and the things he had done. He seemingly forgot the things which his earthly father had taught him and which his heavenly Father had emphasized. He listened to his wives whom he should not have married and appeared to forget his God who had blessed him so richly. He went so far as to build high places for the worship of the pagan gods of his wives and even began to worship and honor them himself.

His fall from the heights of blessing to the depths of unfaithfulness was one of the steepest and saddest falls in all of Scripture (1 Kings 11:1-11). Solomon may have eventually returned to the

Lord and remembered all the things he had seemingly forgotten, but his fall was incredibly costly.

*God wants us to serve Him our **entire** life
not just during **part** of our life.*

(4) The Danger of False Security: The Story of Josiah **2 Kings 22 and 23**

Josiah was one of the last kings of Judah. He began ruling when he was only eight years old. Because he had God-fearing advisors, Josiah grew up as an obedient young man who loved and served God with all his heart. The Bible describes him with these impressive words: *“He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left. . . . Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.”* (2 Kings 22:1-2; 2 Kings 23:25)

Josiah was truly an amazing king. He had a wonderful upbringing and was one of the very best kings that the people of Judah ever had. He received God’s protection, he enjoyed God’s provisions, and he experienced God’s grace over and over again throughout his life. He was a man of integrity, sensitive to the commands and teachings of the Lord. The Bible describes him as a person whose heart was tender and who was truly humble before the Lord. He was genuinely serious about doing the will of God and wept because of the sins and disobedience of his people. He was a man of God and also a man of prayer. (See 2 Chronicles 34:1-33; 35:1-19.)

But when Josiah became older (though still only in his thirties), he made a very significant decision that was contrary to God’s commands. Josiah thought he was secure enough to decide for himself what was right and best. But he was wrong. His disobedience and pride led him to get involved in a battle which God did not want him to fight.

As a result, he was shot by the arrows of one of the enemy archers and was taken away from the battlefield. Within a short time he died. He was only thirty-nine years old! Though he had lived all his life from early childhood as a God-fearing person, his promising career was brought to a sad and

sudden end because of one major act of disobedience. Read the story in 2 Chronicles 35:20-24.

*If we obey God MOST of the time.
that does not give us the right
to disobey Him SOME of the time.*

(5) The Danger of Being Too Comfortable: The Story of David
2 Samuel 11

David was probably the best known of all the kings of the Old Testament. David was especially blessed by God who gave him wonderful promises concerning his children and his future. God also gave David victories over all his enemies, so that his kingdom extended far and wide. When David was walking with the Lord, he was unbeatable. No one could defeat him or destroy him.

David also wrote many of the Psalms found in the Bible. He was an outstanding example of prayerfulness and godliness. He is referred to over and over again in both the Old and New Testaments in positive terms. He was even called “a man after God’s own heart.” (1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22.) There were few people in the Bible who were as important or as significant as David was.

But one day after David had won great victories over his enemies, he decided that his army was strong enough to fight a major battle without him. He stayed home and started looking around his neighborhood from his flat rooftop. While relaxed and comfortable, he saw a beautiful woman bathing outside in her backyard. A lustful desire arose in David’s heart to take her to his bed. And he did—even though she was married to one of David’s most valuable and courageous soldiers. David had faced many dangers from powerful enemies over the years and had won great victories. But now, he faced a different kind of enemy and he was not able to win the battle.

God had always answered David’s prayers for victory. But those victories left David too comfortable, too confident, and too complacent. When he faced a powerful temptation, he was not morally or spiritually prepared to fight this new battle—and he lost. God forgave David for what he had

done, but the consequences of his failure were severe and lasted for the rest of his life (2 Samuel 12:11-14).

*There are no furloughs
in the battle
against sin.*

(6) The Danger of Jealousy: The Story of Miriam
Numbers 12:1-15

Miriam was the older sister of Moses. She had helped to take care of Moses when he was a baby and seemed to have a special relationship with him. When the Israelites were delivered from slavery in Egypt, Miriam took her tambourine, and all the women followed her and joined her in a song of victory and thanksgiving to the Lord (Exodus 15:20-21). Miriam was clearly a leader among the women in Israel.

Later, however, Miriam became jealous of the power and position of her brother Moses. Though she definitely was a woman of prayer and praise, she began to desire more power and praise for herself. So she and her brother Aaron challenged Moses' position of leadership. In doing so, Miriam was actually challenging and dishonoring the Lord who had appointed Moses to this position.

Though she was a woman of prayer, her increasing importance led her to want something that God had chosen not to give her.

Because of her jealousy and pride and her desire for greater honor and recognition, Miriam was stricken with leprosy. Miriam was not healed until Moses prayed for her. God then restored her to health again.

When God answers our prayers for wisdom, victory, and success, it is extremely important not to look with jealousy at others who may have even more wisdom, more victories, and greater success than we do.

*It doesn't mean very much to God
when we praise and thank Him for using us,
if we are jealous of people
whom God is using
even more.*

(7) *The Danger of Impatience: The Story of Abraham*
Genesis 16:1-4

God promised Abraham that He would make him into a great nation and that all the nations of the world would someday be blessed through him and his descendants (Genesis 12: 1-3 and Genesis 17:1-8). This was one of the greatest promises God had given to anyone! Abraham was a man of prayer who walked with God and was very confident that God would do everything He had said He would do. However, in order for the promise to be fulfilled, Abraham and his wife Sarah would obviously have to have descendants. But after being married for many years, they still didn't have even one child!

So, after waiting for almost twenty-five years to have a child of their own, both Abraham and Sarah felt that they had waited long enough! Though they believed that God would fulfill the promise He had given to them, they decided that THEY would have to do something special to make sure the promise would be fulfilled. So Sarah decided to give her servant girl Hagar to Abraham so that they could have a child together. Soon Hagar became pregnant and later gave birth to a son whom she called Ishmael (which means "God hears").

However, it most definitely was not God's plan for Abraham to have a child by Hagar! God had promised to give a son to Abraham and Sarah, not to Abraham and Hagar. Eventually, when Sarah and Abraham were both very old and beyond normal child-bearing age, God did give them a son who was named Isaac (Genesis 17:15-21). God fulfilled His promise in a wonderful and even miraculous way (Romans 4:18-21) and He answered the prayers of Abraham and Sarah in a most unexpected way. However, Abraham's faith temporarily gave place to uncertainty and led him to do things his own way rather than God's way.

As it turned out, Ishmael and his descendants became a source of much turmoil and trouble for Isaac and his descendants (Genesis 16:11-12; 21:8-14; 25:17-18). Those problems continue even today with the strained relationship in many parts of the world between Arabs (descendants of Ishmael) and Jews (descendants of Isaac).

Abraham was truly a man of exceptional faith, and God answered Abraham's prayers in many wonderful ways. However, in one major area, Abraham's impatience led him to make a decision which went contrary to God's will and resulted in thousands of years of turmoil and strife.

*When God gives you a definite promise,
do not become impatient
and take matters into your own hands.
Wait for God's perfect timing!*

(8) The Danger of Self-Importance: The Story of Moses
Numbers 20:2-13

Moses was a man of tremendous courage and exceptional patience. Over and over again the people of Israel grumbled and complained to Moses about their dreadful circumstances in the desert. And over and over again Moses cried out to God in behalf of these ungrateful and impatient people.

God graciously responded to Moses' prayers by mercifully sparing the lives of the Israelites, providing them with food and water in the desert, and even keeping their clothes from wearing out (Deuteronomy 29:5).

On one occasion God provided pure drinking water for the people in the desert by telling Moses to *strike* a rock with the staff which he had earlier used to strike the Nile River back in Egypt. When, in faith, Moses did as God commanded, water flowed from that rock to meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of people (Exodus 17:5-6).

Later, when a similar need arose for drinking water, Moses was told to *speak* to a rock to provide the needed water for the people. But by now this patient man was extremely frustrated with the people and acted foolishly — and sinfully. He said to the people, "*Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?*" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff and water gushed out of the rock so the entire community, along with their cattle, could drink the precious water which God had miraculously provided (Numbers 20:9-11).

By doing what he did and saying what he said ("Shall we bring water for you out of this rock"), Moses not only disobeyed the direct command of

God, but he also seemed to take undue credit for himself and failed to honor the Lord. The Lord looked upon Moses' action as something which dishonored Himself and His holiness in the presence of His people.

Because of this single act, Moses brought down a severe judgment on himself. God declared that Moses would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. Even though Moses had led the people with prayer and patience for nearly 40 years, he forfeited the privilege of leading them into the land that God had promised to His people (Numbers 20:12).

It's not totally clear just why God punished Moses so severely. God still loved him and blessed him and honored him, but He also found it necessary to punish him. Perhaps, after all the years of answers to Moses' prayers, the people were beginning to look to Moses as the person who was necessary for their success. Moses himself might have begun to feel that way, too. God therefore showed both Moses and the people that HE, not Moses, was their protector and provider. HE would lead them into the Promised Land in whatever way He chose. Moses was not indispensable to their well-being. Only GOD was!

*If God chooses to use you and make you a blessing
to many others,
and if He answers many of your prayers in wonderful ways,
do not take to yourself the honor and glory
that belongs to God alone.
And do not consider yourself to be more important
than you really are.*

(9) The Danger of Rash Vows: The Story of Jephthah
Judges 11

Jephthah served as a judge in Israel before Israel was ruled by kings. In those days, a judge was not someone who sat in a court room hearing legal cases but someone who provided the people with leadership. Most of the time the judge was a military person who provided the Israelites with victory over their enemies, though some of the judges provided leadership in other ways as well.

Before he became a judge, Jephthah was not very popular in Israel because his mother was a prostitute and, as he got older, he became involved with a group of people who didn't have a very good reputation (Judges 11:1-3, 7). Later, however, when Jephthah turned out to be a strong military commander, the leaders in Israel invited him to lead their army in a major battle against their enemies. Jephthah first objected but later agreed. Then *"the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah"* (Judges 11:29) and within a fairly short time he was able to provide the people of Israel with a great victory (Judges 11: 32-33).

Before he went into battle Jephthah had prayed to the Lord for a victory. *"[He] made a vow to the Lord and said, 'If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering'"* (Judges 11:30-31). God graciously answered Jephthah's prayer for victory, but when he returned home, he was dismayed to find that the first one who came out to meet him was his precious daughter (Judges 11:34-35).

We're not sure just what happened to this daughter, but in one way or another, Jephthah did keep his vow. But it was clearly a vow made foolishly and in haste. His prayer was answered as he had requested, but the consequences of his vow were much different than he had expected. Instead of leading to joy and gladness and celebration, his answered prayer led to great unhappiness and deep sorrow.

*Do not make a vow to do something
when God answers your prayer
if you are not sure that
it will lead to something that is truly good.*

(10) The Danger of Idolatry: The Story of Gideon **Judges 6-8**

Gideon became a judge at a time when the Midianite people were oppressing Israel. Things were extremely difficult for Israel, and God's people were suffering greatly (Judges 6:1-6). So God raised up Gideon, a humble and relatively insignificant person (Judges 6:15), to deliver His people and give them a great victory.

When Gideon prayed for confirmation that God was really calling him to fight against the Midianites, God gave Gideon some miraculous answers (Judges 6:36-40). Later He used Gideon and just three hundred soldiers to win a mighty victory over a huge foreign army (Judges 7). Gideon had no doubts that God had called him and equipped him and empowered him to win a great battle for His people. Gideon had become a living answer to many prayers.

However, in spite of God's miraculous and wonderful answers to his prayers, Gideon acted very foolishly in his later years. He received much gold from the people of Israel and made it into some kind of ephod which the people began to worship. According to Judges 8:27, the ephod "*became a snare to Gideon and to his family.*"

In many ways Gideon was a faithful, God-fearing man of prayer, but he foolishly and thoughtlessly led the people into a form of idolatry. It's not really surprising, therefore, to learn that "*As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. And the people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side*" (Judges 8:33-34).

When we read this story, we wonder how Gideon could receive such mighty and wonderful answers to prayer and end up doing such a foolish and sinful thing that led people away from the true worship of God! Today we may not be in danger of making an "idol" of gold as Gideon did. But there may be other things or desires or activities which begin to become the major focus of our lives. And when that happens, we, like Gideon, forget our first love (Revelation 2:4-5) and put something else in place of God.

Once again, therefore, we are warned: Do not to focus too much on past victories in answer to your prayers. Do not forget those victories! But do not dwell on them so much that God's answers to yesterday's needs become the primary focus of your spiritual life. No matter how many miracles you may have experienced in the past, yesterday's grace is neither intended nor sufficient for today's needs. Yesterday's problems may have been even greater than those of today, but you still need fresh grace to meet the challenges and needs of each new day. Today calls for the same faith, the same patient, quiet trust in God, and the same commitment to earnest prayer as any time in the past.

*Do not let yesterday's wonderful answers
leave you vulnerable
to the dangers of today.*

LESSON FOUR

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Note: These passages all emphasize the importance of being faithful to the Lord every day in every way until the end of our lives. We should never presume that past victories or successes will keep us from temptation or failure or sin.

Day 1 THE STORY OF JEHOASHAPATH

2 Chronicles 20:5-29, 35-37

Day 2 THE STORY OF UZZIAH

2 Chronicles 26:1-21

Day 3 THE STORY OF JOASH

2 Chronicles 24:1-25

Day 4 THE STORY OF ASA

2 Chronicles 15:1-19; 16:1-14

Day 5 THE STORY OF JONAH

Jonah 2:1-10; Jonah 4:1-11

Day 6 THE STORY OF AARON

Exodus 20:22-24; 24:9-11; 29:35-37, 44-46; 32:1-10

Day 7 THE STORY OF PETER

Acts 11:1-18; Galatians 2:11-14



LESSON FOUR – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Special answers to prayer are almost always followed by significant failures.
2. T F If we fall into sin after receiving a special answer to prayer, we will likely never receive a special answer to prayer again in the future.
3. T F Abraham is a wonderful example of someone who had such a strong prayer life that he never fell into serious sin in spite of his severe trials.
4. T F Some of the most highly praised people in the Bible became involved in a major failure even after God had answered their prayers.
5. T F King Josiah was a man of prayer and a wonderful king who died at a fairly young age because of his disobedience to God.
6. T F If we are faithful and sincere in our prayer life, we will never fall into a serious sin.
7. T F The Bible emphasizes Solomon's return to God after he had grievously sinned.
8. T F Miriam was a woman of prayer who was stricken with leprosy because she was jealous of her brother Moses.
9. T F Gideon was defeated by his enemies because he neglected to pray at the time of battle.
10. T F Jephthah prayed to God for victory and received what he asked for.



MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

- Which of the following statements best reflects the main focus of this Lesson.
 - Though we should always be thankful for God's answers to our prayers, we should also recognize that those answers may actually lead to certain dangers and we should always guard against them.
 - Since God's answers to our prayers always lead us into dangerous situations, we should be careful not to become too enthusiastic about His answers, even if they are exactly what we wanted.
 - We should be very careful what we ask for, since God's answers might solve one problem but create an even bigger problem.
- What does the Bible tell us about King Josiah in 2 Kings 22:1-2?
 - "Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord . . . and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left except when attacked by his enemies."
 - "Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord . . . and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left."
 - Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord . . . and he rarely turned aside to the right or to the left."
- Who prayed the following prayer? "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition . . . Therefore . . . as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:27-28).
 - David
 - Abraham
 - Hannah
- What promise did God give to King Hezekiah after he prayed for health and healing?
 - God promised that he would give Hezekiah a son before he died.
 - God promised that he would give Hezekiah fifteen additional years of life.
 - God promised Hezekiah that would be healed and would never become sick again.
- What caused David to fall into a great sin after winning so many battles in answer to prayer?
 - Fear
 - Pride
 - Lust

6. What happened when Abraham decided to have a child by his servant girl?
 - A. God withdrew his promises that He had earlier given to Abraham.
 - B. A child was born who brought a lot of friction and many trials into Abraham's family.
 - C. A child was born but did not grow up to manhood.
7. The sinful failures of the persons described in this Lesson:
 - A. Had relatively minor consequences.
 - B. Led to sorrow, sadness, loss or other negative consequences.
 - C. Were rarely known by people who were not directly involved.
8. It appears that most or all of the persons in this Lesson who fell into serious sin:
 - A. Were spiritually weak to begin with so they easily gave in to temptation.
 - B. Never had a strong prayer life.
 - C. Had a strong prayer life at least at one point in their lives.
9. Which of the following statements reflects the teachings of this Lesson?
 - A. Almost every Christian leader will at some point likely fall into serious sin of one kind or another.
 - B. We must constantly and prayerfully guard against pride, lust, jealousy and every known sin or weakness and not assume that we are beyond the reach of serious sin.
 - C. We do not have to be overly concerned about falling into sin since God will graciously forgive of us.
10. Which of the following statements best reflects the teachings of this Lesson?
 - A. Those who are in positions of Christian leadership may sometimes be punished more severely than others when they fall into sin.
 - B. If we continue to pray, God will usually not punish us in any significant way because of our failures and sins.
 - C. True believers will never be punished for their sins on earth, since Jesus has already paid the penalty for every one of our sins.

LESSON FOUR – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following statements seems to best reflect the main focus of this Lesson?
 - A. Though we should always be thankful for God's answers to our prayers, we should also recognize that those answers may actually lead to certain dangers and we should always be aware of those dangers and guard against them.
 - B. Since God's answers to our prayers usually lead us into dangerous situations, we should be careful not to become too enthusiastic about His answers, even if they are exactly what we wanted.
 - C. We should be very careful what we ask for, since God's answers might solve one problem but create an even bigger problem.
2. According to Isaiah 37:17 and 20, why did Hezekiah ask God to answer his prayer for deliverance?
3. What two wonderful answers to prayer did Hezekiah experience? See Isaiah 37-39.
 - A.
 - B.
4. In what way did Hezekiah fail to honor God after God had answered his prayers? See Isaiah 39:1-5 and 2 Chronicles 32:31.
5. Elijah experienced many victories in answer to prayer. List three of the ones you regard as the most significant or the most remarkable.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
6. What prompted Elijah to run away into the desert? See 1 Kings 19:1-4.
7.
 - A. How would you describe King Solomon during the first part of his life as king?
 - B. What negative things happened in the latter part of Solomon's life?
8. What are some of the things we can learn from Solomon's life?
9. What does the Bible tell us about King Josiah in 2 Kings 22:1-2 and 2 Kings 23:24-25?

10. What decision did Josiah make near the end of his life which brought about his death? See 2 Chronicles 35:20-24.
11. A. What does the Bible teach us about David in 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22?
B. After serving God faithfully for many years and experiencing many answers to his prayers, what grievous sins did David commit? See 2 Samuel 11.
C. What can we learn from the story of David?
12. A. What did Miriam do that caused the Lord to punish her? See Numbers 12:1-15.
B. What punishment did she receive?
C. How was she cured of her disease?
13. A. What great promise did the Lord give to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3?
B. Why did Abraham think that it was necessary for him to “help” God fulfill this promise even if it would get him involved in some behavior that was not pleasing to God? See Genesis 16:1-2.
14. What was the ultimate result when Abraham went ahead with his own plan rather than waiting for God to fulfill His promise in His own way? See Genesis 16:4-7; Genesis 21:8-21; Genesis 25:18.
15. A. What do Exodus 14:31 and Exodus 19:9 tell us about Moses’ position among the people of God?
B. What amazing thing does Exodus 33:11 teach us about Moses’ relationship to God?
16. What led God to punish Moses by not letting him lead His people into the Promised Land? See Numbers 20:9-13.
17. A. Why do you think God pronounced such a severe penalty on someone who had been such a special, faithful servant for so many years?
B. What can we learn from this event in Moses’ life?
18. A. What vow did Jephthah make when he prayed to God? See Judges 11:30-31.
B. Do you think Jephthah’s vow was foolish or did it simply demonstrate his sincerity when he prayed? Please give the reason for your answer.
19. A. When the Lord first called Gideon to be a judge over Israel, why were the Israelites suffering as they were? See Judges 6:9-10.
B. What was the first major thing God called Gideon to do before he went out and fought against Israel’s enemies? See Judges 6:25-26.

20. A. After God had answered Gideon's prayers and given him an amazing victory in battle, how did Gideon lead the people astray? See Judges 8:24-27.
- B. What was the result of Gideon's sin and foolishness? See Judges 8:27 and 8:33-34.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. This Lesson lists ten dangers or temptations which arose in the lives of some of God's very special people AFTER He had answered their prayers. Do you think these dangers still exist today? If so, how can we best defend ourselves against these dangers or temptations?
2. Which of these "dangers" do you think are most likely to find a place in your own life or in the lives of today's Christian leaders?
3. Out of the ten stories presented in this Lesson, which one(s) do you find to be the most sad, most discouraging, or most disappointing? Please give the reason for your answer.
4. Do you think the punishments which the people in this Lesson received were "appropriate?" Did some of the punishments seem too severe . . . or too light? How would you determine what would be an "appropriate" punishment in each situation?
5. Many of the falls or failures referred to in this Lesson came in the latter part of a person's life after they had received many blessings from God and experienced many answers to their prayers. What are some things we can learn from this?
6. Why do you think Elijah ran away from Queen Jezebel instead of confronting her?
7. Many people fall into sin in areas where they thought they were strong. Why do you think this happens?
8. Is it possible for someone to become a "better person" in some ways because he or she fell into serious sin with significant consequences? Please explain your answer.
9. Why do you think God "permits" some wonderful and effective leaders to fall into very serious sins even though they have very significant consequences for God's own honor as well as for the leaders themselves?
10. Would you agree with the statement: "When I am weak, then I am strong, and when I am strong, then I am weak"? Please give the reason for your answer.

WHEN GOD SAYS “NO”

Lesson Five

PRAYER

Introduction

Does God always hear our prayers as He promised He would? Yes He does. Does He always answer our prayers the way we would like? Certainly not! We usually refer to prayers which do not receive the answer we were looking for as “unanswered prayers” but it’s important to remember that “No” is as much of an answer as “Yes” is.

Almost all of us have experienced times when our prayers were not “answered” the way we had hoped. We prayed for a job, but we could not find work. We prayed for money, but we did not receive it. We prayed for strength but we stumbled and fell. We prayed for victory, but we did not win. We prayed for light, but we groped in the darkness. We prayed for peace but we saw only conflict. We prayed for the sick, but they did not get better.

Thankfully, most of us can also point to those many times when God did grant us the desires of our hearts. He gave us food when we were hungry. He restored our health when we were sick. He kept us safe when we were in danger. He guided our steps when we were lost. He gave us peace when we were in turmoil. He gave us comfort when we were sad. So we KNOW that God does graciously answer prayer and He does often give us what we have asked for. And sometimes He even gives us even more! But we also know that God sometimes says “No” rather than “Yes.” And we often wonder why.

The Bible does not answer all our questions concerning “unanswered prayer.” There are times and circumstances when

we just cannot understand why things happen as they do. But the Bible does help us understand why at least some of our prayers do not receive the answers we were hoping for.

In this lesson we will consider ten possible reasons why God might answer our prayers with a “No”—or, seemingly, not at all. We will then look at some Biblical passages or examples which illustrate those reasons.

POSSIBLE REASONS WHY GOD SAYS “NO.”

1. One of the major reasons why God does not respond positively to our prayers is because there are unconfessed sins in our lives.

If we deliberately harbor sin in our hearts and do not repent of those sins, we create a barrier between ourselves and God, and God will not answer our prayers the way we desire. A positive answer to our prayers requires humility, sincerity, and integrity on our part.

The Psalm writer wrote: *“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the LORD would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.”* Psalm 66:18-19

To the people of Israel God said: *“When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good.”* Isaiah 1:15-17

Isaiah wrote: *“Your 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

The prophet Zechariah wrote about the sinful Israelites this way: *“They refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. . . . Therefore great anger came from the LORD of hosts. ‘As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear,’ says the LORD of hosts.”* Zechariah 7:11-13

Read the following examples of times when God did not answer prayers because of the sins of the people who offered them.

Moses told the people of Israel: *“So I spoke to you, and you would not listen; but you rebelled against the command of the LORD and*

presumptuously went up into the hill country . . . And you returned and wept before the LORD, but the LORD did not listen to your voice or give ear to you.’” Deuteronomy 1:43-45

Concerning the people of Israel, God said, *“Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?’ And I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods.”* Deuteronomy 31:17-18

Many years later the Lord said concerning the people of Israel: *“They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. . . . Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them. . . . Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble.”* Jeremiah 11:10-14 See also Jeremiah 14:10-12 and 15:1.

After the Israelites were taken into captivity, the Lord said, *“And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them.”* Ezekiel 39:23-24

- 2. Another reason why God may not answer our prayers is because we sometimes pray with the wrong motives.** We do not always ask for things in order that God’s name will be glorified or that His Kingdom will be advanced. We sometimes ask for things selfishly or for things which will serve only to make our lives easier or more pleasant. It’s certainly not wrong to ask for things that would make our lives more comfortable, but we must be sure not to ask for things which would be displeasing to Him. God wants us to focus our prayers and requests on things which will help us to serve HIM better. He doesn’t want us to use the privilege and blessing of

prayer simply to focus on our own wishes and desires—whether these would really be good for us or not.

James wrote, *“You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”* James 4:2-3

Jesus said, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* Matthew 6:33

The Psalmist wrote, *“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* Psalm 37:4

And Peter reminds us that *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* 1 Peter 5:5

- 3. If we harbor an unforgiving or negative attitude toward others in our hearts, God may refuse to grant us what we ask for—** even if we ask for something that would normally be considered good and desirable. If God chooses to answer some of our prayers with a “No,” He may be reminding us that we need to restore a broken relationship with someone or to forgive a person who may have hurt us or offended us.

Jesus said: *“When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”* Mark 11:25

John reminds us that it is impossible to truly love God the way we should if we have hatred in our hearts for our brother. *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar.”* 1 John 4:20

Peter emphasized that even a broken or improper relationship between married partners can have a negative effect on their prayer life. He wrote: *“Husbands . . . be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”* 1 Peter 3:7

4. Sometimes God does not answer our prayers the way we desire because He is punishing us for some sin we have committed.

Even though He graciously forgives our sins when we confess and forsake them, He may still punish us for that sin or let sin “run its course” in our lives with all the negative consequences that result from a bad or sinful choice we have made.

One of the best examples of this is found in the life of David. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, God sent the prophet Nathan to him to confront him about what he had done. David immediately confessed his sin to the Lord. Nathan then told David, “*The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD . . . the child who is born to you shall die*” (2 Samuel 12:13-16). *David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent all night lying on the ground* (2 Samuel 12:13-16). But in spite of David’s earnest pleas, God did not spare the child’s life.

Sometimes the sins of parents continue to have serious negative effects in the lives of future generations. David’s sin, for example, resulted in severe punishment that was expressed in these words, “*Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife*” (2 Samuel 12:10).

This may be an example of what God meant when he said, “*I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.*” Exodus 20:4-5

5. Sometimes God uses unpleasant or difficult circumstances to draw us closer to Himself. By not granting what we ask, God may be moving us to focus on eternal and spiritual values rather than on physical or material things. He wants us to grow spiritually to become more like Christ. He knows that our greatest spiritual growth often comes through trials, hurt, defeat, sickness or disappointment rather than through material prosperity or success. If God always granted us everything we asked for, we might become proud, selfish, and excessively focused on earthly things.

There are many examples of people, both in the Bible and today, who became much more effective spiritually and even much happier because of their affliction or weakness or trials which the Lord chose not to take away. God wants us to put HIM in first place in our lives so that we focus our lives on bringing glory and honor to Him through how we live. The natural tendency for us is to focus on our own interests and needs rather than on the kingdom of God, but a “No” answer from God can help us re-focus on the Lord and His kingdom.

The apostle Paul is an outstanding example of spiritual growth which came when God answered His earnest prayers with a clear “No.” Paul wrote:

“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

In writing to the Corinthian believers Paul reflected further on the fact that believers often suffer trials of one kind or another. He wrote: *“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:16-18*

James emphasized the same truth when he wrote: *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4*

The Psalmist wrote, “*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word . . . It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.*” Psalm 119:67, 71

It is good to remember these things, so that we do not become overly discouraged when God does not immediately answer our prayers for good health, peace, safety, or deliverance. If we are walking in fellowship with Him and at peace with our neighbor, we may be confident that God is truly working out all things for our good, even if our circumstances are unpleasant or difficult (Romans 8:28).

6. By not giving us something we desire or ask for, God may be saying “No” so that something much better can be accomplished.

Though it may seem that God is not listening to our prayers, He may be responding in a way that leads to greater and better things than we asked for.

In Old Testament times, Joseph was passionately hated by his brothers who eventually sold him to some slave traders on their way to Egypt. In Egypt he was unjustly accused of assaulting his master’s wife, he was put in an Egyptian jail for several years, and then he was forgotten by someone who might have helped free him (Genesis 37:12-36, Genesis 39, Genesis 40:14-15, 23).

Though no specific mention is made of Joseph’s prayer life in these chapters, we may assume that Joseph was a man who spent much time with God in prayer. Many years after he had emerged victorious over all these trials, he said to his brothers, “*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today*” (Genesis 50:20). God did not keep Joseph from being sold, betrayed, imprisoned, or forgotten, but He used all these difficult circumstances to prepare him for future ministry and service which resulted in the rescue of his extended family and the saving of many others.

On his second missionary journey Paul wanted to go to a province in Asia Minor to carry out his mission work, but God prevented him from going there (Acts 16:6-7). In Romans 1:13

Paul indicated that he often had wanted to go to Rome but was prevented from doing so. By saying “No” to Paul’s plans, God was guiding him to places where he would have a much more effective and fruitful ministry.

When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he wrote, “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” Philippians 1:12-14

Jesus Himself prayed passionately and earnestly to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane that His cup of suffering might be taken away from Him—but it wasn’t (Luke 22:42-44). And throughout history millions of people continue to thank Jesus for His willingness to suffer and die for them—even though their salvation was purchased at such an awesome price.

God often works out His purposes in ways that go beyond our own prayers, plans or desires. Many people have been very grateful that God did not answer their prayers the way they had asked, since they realized later that God’s answer was far better than anything they had asked for or hoped for.

- 7. There are times and situations where sincere people may pray for opposite things which cannot both happen at the same time.** For example, enemies may pray for a victory in the same battle. Opposing sports teams may pray for a win in the same game. Two people may desire to obtain the same job. Political opponents may both pray for victory in the same election. Two students may pray for the same scholarship. Two men may wish to marry the same girl or two girls may desire the same man as their husband.

We must recognize that God is in control of all things and that HIS purposes will ultimately be accomplished. We may not understand why one person “wins” while another “loses,” but we may be sure that God is working things out in a way that will truly advance the cause of His kingdom while also being best for everyone who sincerely commits his life to the Lord.

- 8. There may be times when we do not pray with a humble and sincere faith that God will answer our prayers.** Faith is not some kind of “magic” which automatically guarantees that our prayers will be answered. Rather, faith is a sure confidence and trust that our loving heavenly Father will truly grant what is best for us when we seek to do His will and live to His honor and glory.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us: *“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”* Hebrews 11:6

James wrote: *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.”*

Jesus said: *“‘Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.’”* Mark 11:22, 24

Those who do not have faith in God and His promises will often find that their prayers are not answered as they desire. A clear example of that is found in Jesus’ own experience in His home town of Nazareth. The Bible tells us that Jesus did not perform many miracles there because of the people’s lack of faith. Mark describes that sad situation in these words, *“And he [Jesus] marveled because of their unbelief.”* Mark 6:1-6

- 9. Sometimes we may give up too quickly when we pray.** We may become frustrated, discouraged, or unhappy when we don’t immediately receive the answer we want, so we stop praying. And, as a result, we don’t receive the answer God is ready to give us in His own time.

The prophet Isaiah wrote many years ago,

“The LORD waits to be gracious to you and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.” Isaiah 30:18

There are some wonderful examples of positive, persevering prayer in the Bible by people who wouldn’t take “No” as God’s *final* answer—even if God’s *first* answer clearly appeared to be “No.”

Consider the following examples from the Old Testament.

“Then I [Daniel] turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” Daniel 9:3

Elijah prayed seven times for rain *“with his face between his knees”* before God answered him. After the seventh time, God sent black clouds, a strong wind, and waves of rain. 1 Kings 18:41-46

Jacob kept wrestling with an angel throughout an entire night and said to him, *“I will not let you go unless you bless me.”* Genesis 32:26

Nehemiah *“wept and mourned for days, and continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven . . . day and night . . . confessing the sins of the people.”* Nehemiah 1:4, 6

Read these examples from the New Testament.

A Canaanite woman, a Gentile, kept asking Jesus to heal her daughter until Jesus finally answered her request. Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus told a parable about a woman who was dealing with an unjust judge. She kept asking him for justice until he finally granted her what she asked for. After telling this story, Jesus said, *“Will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?”* Luke 18:7

10. There are times when we do not pray according to the will of God. Many times we do know what God’s will is since He has revealed it to us in the Bible. At other times, however, we really are not totally sure what God’s will is in a specific situation. At such

times we must pray the more earnestly for the leading of the Holy Spirit as we seek to discern what God's will is. It is also appropriate in those situations to add to our petitions the phrase, *"If it be Your will."*

When we add those words to our prayers, we are not praying with a lack of faith. We simply acknowledge that we know that God's ways are higher than our ways and that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We confess that we know so little and that our understanding is so limited. We also acknowledge that our own desires and motives may not be perfectly pure, so we humbly submit our own desires to God's perfect will.

Read the following Scripture passages about praying according to the will of God.

"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." 1 John 5:14-15

Jesus prayed the night before his crucifixion: *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."* Luke 22:42

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Romans 8:26-27

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

By carefully studying what the Bible teaches us about prayer, we learn that there are many reasons why our prayers are sometimes not answered in the way we hope or desire. Many times we are prompted by our "unanswered prayers" to humbly examine our hearts, check our motives, and re-evaluate

our desires. Sometimes we may be led to confess hidden sins. At other times we may be moved to exercise greater patience, deeper humility or greater perseverance. And frequently we will be led to recognize and accept the need for spiritual discipline so that we may become the kind of people God wants us to be.

There are also times, however, when we can do nothing more than humbly submit to the sovereign—and sometimes mysterious—will of God. With Job in the Old Testament, we just do not understand why some things happen as they do. With the Psalmist we cry out to God for help in circumstances which are completely beyond our comprehension. We honestly do not know of any reason why the Lord does not answer us. (Read Psalm 22:1-21; Psalm 44:9-25; Psalm 88:1-18.)

In times like that, we can only cast ourselves in humble faith on the unfailing mercies of the Lord, as Jeremiah did after the fall of Jerusalem. He wrote, *“For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men.”* Lamentations 3:31-33

God graciously invites us to pray and sincerely means what He says when He promises to hear and answer us. At the same time, we must never forget that He is Almighty God and we are but mortal creatures with limited knowledge, limited understanding, and limited holiness. To Him belong the glory and praise for ever!

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” Romans 11:33-36

LESSON FIVE

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Day 1 PRAYER AND HOLINESS

2 Samuel 22:24-25; Psalm 41:1-3; Proverbs 15:8, 29;
Deuteronomy 3:23-26; Jeremiah 14:10-12

Day 2 PRAYER AND THE WILL OF GOD

Romans 12:2; Colossians 1:9-14; 1 Peter 4:19;
Ephesians 1:17-19; Ephesians 5:15-20

Day 3 PRAYER AND FAITH

Matthew 8:10, 13; Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 4:35-41;
Luke 12:22-31; Romans 4:18-21

Day 4 PRAYER AND THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WAYS

Psalm 44:6-26

Day 5 PRAYER AND PERSEVERANCE

Psalm 55:16-19; Luke 2:36-37; Nehemiah 1:4-10;
1 Samuel 1:10-17

Day 6 PRAYER AND THE ETERNAL PLAN AND PURPOSE OF GOD

Isaiah 55:8-9; Deuteronomy 29:29; Ephesians 1:11; Psalm 115:3;
Psalm 135:6; Ezekiel 12:25-28

Day 7 PRAYER AND VICTORY THROUGH SUFFERING

Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 4:1-2; 1 Peter 4:12-13; Hebrews 12:7-12;
2 Corinthians 12:7-10



LESSON FIVE – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Isaiah 1:15-17 teaches that God will overlook our sins if we pray more often and more earnestly.
2. T F Jeremiah 11:10-14 and Zechariah 7:11-13 both teach that God would not listen to the prayers of His people because of their sins.
3. T F Exodus 20:4-5 teaches that the sins of parents or grandparents may have a direct effect on their children and grandchildren.
4. T F The apostle Paul is one of the best examples of how God will answer every sincere petition of His faithful children with a clear and positive “Yes.”
5. T F Psalm 119:67 and 71 both teach that it is good at times to be afflicted by God so that we can get more positive answers to our prayers.
6. T F Jesus is the only person who had all His prayers answered with a “Yes” since He perfectly knew and did the will of God.
7. T F Nehemiah is an example of a person who walked so closely with the Lord that his prayers were answered as soon as he began praying. (See Nehemiah 1:4, 6.)
8. T F If we are faithfully walking with the Lord, we will always know without any doubt how we should pray about any situation. (See Romans 8:26-27.)
9. T F If we are faithfully walking with God in trust and obedience, we may be confident that God is truly working out all things for our good.
10. T F The Bible teaches that “without faith it is impossible to please God.”



MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1. Read Psalm 37:4 and then indicate which of the following statements best explains what it means.
 - A. If we want to acquire earthly goods and treasures we should humbly seek to persuade God to give us what we desire.
 - B. We should always put God in first place in our lives so that our wants and desires will be in harmony with His will.
 - C. God will often not give us what we ask for, since our personal desires are usually not pleasing to Him.
2. Which of the following statements is most accurate?
 - A. God will answer every prayer with a "Yes" if we persevere in prayer.
 - B. There are times when God doesn't answer our prayers with a "Yes" and sometimes we really don't know why.
 - C. There are times when God doesn't answer our prayers with a "Yes," but He always tells us why.
3. When Paul prayed earnestly that God would take away the thorn in his flesh, how did God respond to Paul? See 2 Corinthians 12:9.
 - A. God mercifully removed the thorn and brought an end to Paul's suffering.
 - B. God told Paul to keep on praying until God chose the best time to end his suffering.
 - C. God did not remove the thorn but He promised to give Paul the grace and ability to endure the suffering.
4. What happened when David earnestly prayed that God would heal his son who was born through David's sinful relationship with another man's wife? See 2 Samuel 12:13-14.
 - A. God graciously forgave David and healed his son in answer to his prayer.
 - B. God refused to forgive David and the child died.
 - C. God forgave David but the child died in spite of his earnest prayer.
5. According to Isaiah 59:2-4, why did God not respond to the prayers of His people?
 - A. The people were exceedingly sinful.
 - B. The people were not serious in their requests.
 - C. The people had insufficient faith that God would answer them.

6. What reason does James give in chapter 4:3 why some prayers are not answered?
- A. People pray with the wrong motives.
 - B. People doubt God's power to answer them.
 - C. People do not forgive those who had offended them.
7. How many times did Elijah, the great man of prayer, pray for rain before the rain came? (See James 5:17-18 and I Kings 18:42-45.)
- A. One time
 - B. Three times
 - C. Seven times
8. When Joseph suffered much because of the actions of his brothers, what did he say to them? (See Genesis 50:20.)
- A. "I deserved what I received because of my sins."
 - B. "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."
 - C. "I will not pay you back for what you did, but God surely will."
9. Complete this statement from Psalm 66:18: "If I had cherished sin in my heart . . .
- A. The Lord would have graciously forgiven me (and heard my prayer)."
 - B. The Lord would have overlooked my sin (and heard my prayer)."
 - C. The Lord would not have listened (to my prayer)."
10. According to 1 Peter 3:7:
- A. A broken marriage can hinder a person's prayer life.
 - B. Marriage relationships have little or nothing to do with our prayer life.
 - C. People should never blame an ineffective prayer life on a bad marriage.



LESSON FIVE – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Why was it “good” for the Psalmist to be afflicted? See Psalm 119:67.
2. According to Isaiah 59:2, why did God not listen to the prayers of His people?
3. Summarize the basic message of Jeremiah 14:10-12 and Jeremiah 15:1.
4. What reason does James give in chapter 4:2-3 why some prayers are not answered?
5. A. Complete this statement from Psalm 66:18: “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, _____.”
B. What does it mean to “cherish iniquity”?
6. What does a good marriage have to do with our prayer life? See 1 Peter 3:7.
7. Read 2 Samuel 12: 13-14 and answer the following questions.
A. Did God ever forgive David for committing the sin of adultery?
B. Why did God punish David by taking away his son?
8. A. When Paul prayed earnestly that God would take away the thorn in his flesh, how did God respond to Paul? See 2 Corinthians 12:9.
B. How did Paul respond to this answer from God? See 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.
9. A. Complete this statement from Psalm 119:67: “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now _____.”
B. Complete this statement from Psalm 119:71: “It’s good for me that I was afflicted, that I _____.”
10. What did Jesus teach about prayer in His parable in Luke 18:1-8?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Are you personally concerned about the problem of “unanswered prayers,” or is this not a big issue for you? Please give the reason for your answer.
2. A. There are ten reasons listed in this Lesson why God may not answer some of our prayers the way we would like. Can you think of any other reasons why God might not answer our prayers with a “Yes”?
B. Which of the reasons given in the Lesson would seem to be most significant in your own life?

3. How would you respond to someone who makes the following statement?
- “Since God does not answer SOME of my prayers, I cannot be sure that He will answer ANY of my prayers.”
4. Can you think of any times when you were grateful that the Lord did not answer your prayers in the way you wanted? Please explain.
5. A. Were there any times in your life when you did not receive a “Yes” answer to your prayers at first, but later you did—after persevering in prayer for quite some time? If so, how did that affect your prayer life? If that never happened, do you think that sometimes you may have given up praying too quickly?
- B. Do you know of any people who persevered in prayer for a long time and finally received a “Yes” answer from the Lord? Please describe what happened.
6. Since God cannot answer “Yes” to people who ask for opposite things—such as opponents who both seek to win in a game or contest or election, how should we pray in such situations? Is it wrong to pray for “victory” if that means that others will lose and their prayers will not be answered as they desire?
7. Do you think it is desirable or necessary to add to our prayers: “If it be Your will”? Please give the reason for your answer.
8. A. Do you think that many people do not experience miracles today because of their lack of faith? (See Mark 6:5-6.)
- B. Does believing that something will happen when you pray “guarantee” that it will happen? Please explain your answer.
9. Read Romans 11:33-36. What is the significance of this passage for our prayer life?
10. A. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
- “Our greatest spiritual growth often comes through trials, hurts, defeat, sickness or disappointment.” See James 1:2-4.
- B. Since we do sometimes grow through unpleasant experiences, should we pray that God will send trials and hurts into our lives? Please give the reason for your answer.

PRAYERS OF PRAISE

Lesson Six

PRAYER

Introduction

For some people, prayer seems to be primarily a means of getting something from God. If they have a need or wish or desire, they ask God to take care of it for them. And that is the extent of their praying.

It certainly is not wrong to ask God for things we need. God invites us to pray about *everything*, and He graciously answers our prayers in many wonderful ways. But our prayer life should not be focused first of all on what we need or want. Our primary focus should be on bringing praise to God for who He is and for what He has done. When we do that, God is honored and glorified. And glorifying God should always be the primary purpose of our lives.

There may, of course, be times in our lives when it is difficult to praise God because of the burdens we bear or the trials we experience. But God is even more glorified when we praise Him under those challenging circumstances.

When our sincere and genuine praise is stifled by trials or muffled by tears, and we demonstrate that we still believe God is worthy of our praise, we truly praise His name. And when we continue to praise God even when life is very hard for us, God often responds to our prayers in a special way—with the result that we praise Him even more!

When we look around our world and see that there are multitudes of people who are not praising or honoring our Lord, we might easily become discouraged. It's important for us, therefore, to remember that every moment of every day God *is* being praised by His people around the world.

It's also important to remember that in heaven multitudes of saints and angels are praising God without ceasing as they worship and praise Him in humble adoration (Revelation 4:8-11 and 5:8-14).

And it's encouraging to know that some day we who love the Lord will join with multitudes of others in praising Him forever in a place of never-ending joy and delight (Revelation 21:22-27; 22:1-5; Ephesians 3:20-21).

QUESTIONS ABOUT PRAISE

1. What is the difference between thanksgiving and praise?

Thanksgiving is an expression of appreciation and gratitude to God for something He has done for us or given to us or to others. Praise is an expression of awe or wonder or delight which is intended to bring honor and glory to God for who He is or for what He has done or will do.

2. How can we praise God in our prayers?

Sometimes we express our praise simply by saying, "We praise You, O God." At other times we may indicate specifically what it is that we are praising Him for. We can also praise Him by sincerely confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness . . . or by asking for His help in a time of need . . . or by thanking Him for blessings He has already given us. When we acknowledge how much we need Him and give Him sincere thanks for what He has already done for us, we acknowledge that He is the ultimate Source of everything we need and the Giver of every gift we already enjoy. And when we do that, we bring Him honor and glory and praise.

3. How can we make praise a more meaningful part of our prayers?

A. We should seriously *examine our motives* when we pray. If we don't, we may easily become self-centered rather than God-centered. The primary goal of our prayers is not that we may become more comfortable but that God may increasingly be honored and glorified in our lives.

Though we certainly may ask God to meet our needs when we pray, our primary focus should be on God's glory rather than on our needs.

- B. We must ASK God to help us praise Him in our prayers. We can never ask God too often for that kind of help and He will never tire of that kind of request.
- C. We should deliberately seek to focus more on spiritual things than on physical or material things. The temptation to focus on the temporal rather than on the eternal is very strong. The newspapers and magazines we read, the TV we watch, the music we hear, the things we see, and the work we do are usually centered on earthly things, most of which will soon pass away.

Unless we make a genuine effort to put God first in our thinking and living, we will find that serving and loving and praising God is not really our highest priority. If our thought life would be more God-centered, our prayer life would be, too.

- D. We should frequently join with other believers in praising God. By joining with others, we can learn from them, share with them, and be reminded of things for which we can and should praise God.

4. What is the meaning of the word “HALLELUJAH”?

Hallelujah is a Hebrew word which literally means “Praise Yahweh” or “Praise the LORD.” The word “LORD” refers to the sacred name of God which is translated in some Bible versions as “Yahweh” or “Jehovah” but more frequently as “LORD.” As a sincere expression of praise to God, the word “Hallelujah” is found most frequently in the Old Testament in the book of Psalms and is found in the New Testament in several verses in Revelation 19. Expressing this word in sincerity is a simple yet profound way of praising the one true God for all His blessings.

A BEAUTIFUL PSALM OF PRAISE

In this Lesson we will look at a number of verses under separate headings as we remind ourselves of the many reasons we have to bring honor and glory and praise to our great Creator and Redeemer. We begin with a beautiful reading from the Psalms.

*“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
 You have set your glory above the heavens. . . .
 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
 what is man that you are mindful of him,
 and the son of man that you care for him?
 You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
 and crowned him with glory and honor.
 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
 you have put all things under his feet. . . .
 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.”*

Psalm 8

THE CALL TO PRAISE

“Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!” Psalm 34:3

“Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD! Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised!” Psalm 113:1-3

“Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.” Psalm 147:1

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9

“Through him [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” Hebrews 13:15

PRAISE GOD FOR WHO HE IS

We must study the Bible faithfully so that we will understand better what our God is really like. If we fail to do that, we may forget how gracious and kind He is . . . how holy and righteous . . . how merciful and mighty. . . how majestic and powerful.

Scripture References

“Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD! . . . The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! Who is like the LORD our God who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?” Psalm 113:1, 4-6

“The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake. Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise your great and awesome name—he is holy.” Psalm 99:1-3

“O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart.” 2 Chronicles 6:14

“[God] is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.” 1 Timothy 6:15b-16

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS WONDERFUL CREATION

When we read in the Bible about God’s incredible power in creation and when we witness the majesty of that creation, we should continually be inspired to bring Him honor and glory and praise. Regrettably, many people see the wonder and beauty of our world and the incredible complexity of living beings, but fail to recognize the One who created all these things. The Psalmists in the Old Testament, however, recognized creation as the handiwork of the almighty Creator and gave Him glory and praise for His marvelous works.

Scripture References

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun.” Psalm 19:1-4

“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts! Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you

highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created.”
Psalm 148:1-5

“Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.” Psalm 95:1-5

Other writers in both Old Testament and New Testament recognized the creative power of the One who created our universe and joyfully expressed their praise.

“Stand up and bless the LORD your God, from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.” Nehemiah 9:5-6

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” Revelation 4:11

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS MAJESTY AND GLORY

Although there are thousands of “gods” who have been worshiped and praised at one time or another, there is only one true God who alone is glorious and worthy of praise. All other gods are worthless and are nothing more than the “creations” of the ones who worship them. The people of Israel knew this, but at times they were enticed by lust or greed or thoughtlessness to worship the false gods of the nations around them.

However, faithful writers in both Old Testament and New Testament times clearly and passionately recognized the God of creation as the only God whom they should humbly, joyfully, and faithfully worship and praise.

Scripture References

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory!” Psalm 72:18-19

“Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! . . . Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.” Psalm 96:1-6

“I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.” Psalm 145:1-5

“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty. . . . Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you.” Revelation 15:3-4

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS GREATNESS AND POWER

In a world that frequently applauds the accomplishments and creations of men, it's important for Christians to recognize and praise God as the ultimate Source of all creative power and achievements of human beings. The Psalmists not only praised God themselves, but they also called all “kingdoms of the earth” to exalt the name and power of the one true God.

“Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.” Psalm 150:2

“Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! Say to God, ‘How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you; they sing praises to you, they sing praises to your name!’” Psalm 66:1-4

“Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the LORD . . . Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies. You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary . . . Praise be to God!” Psalm 68:32-36

“Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. . . . Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.” Psalm 150:1-2, 6

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS MERCY AND COMPASSION

The Lord answers the prayers of His people for mercy and compassion in many different and wonderful ways. He heals the sick, comforts the sorrowing, strengthens the weak, shelters the homeless, feeds the hungry, forgivers the repentant, and showers His people with blessings beyond number.

One of the greatest blessings of His mercy is the forgiveness of the sins of those who acknowledge their failures and who look to Him for pardon and reconciliation. Those who do not recognize their own sins or who seek to find pardon through their own efforts not only fail to find the forgiveness they need and desire, but they also fail to bring praise to God for the wonders of His mercy and compassion.

Scripture References

“Bless the LORD, O my soul . . . and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Psalm 103:2-5

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” Exodus 34:6-7

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far

does he remove our transgressions from us. . . . Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul! ” Psalm 103:8-12, 22

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS

One of the best known verses in the Bible is John 3:16 where we read that *“God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes on Him should not perish but have eternal life.”* Most Bible students are also familiar with the words of God in 1 John 4:8 where we read that *“God is love.”*

However, long before the New Testament was written, Old Testament writers also extolled the love of God. These writers recognized that God was faithful to all His loving promises and acknowledged that He was a God upon whom His people could always depend. The writers also called on other nations to praise the God of Israel as they emphasized that His faithfulness endured through all generations—in spite of His people’s frequent failures to love and serve and obey Him. God’s mercies never come to an end, and He is forever worthy of our highest praise.

Scripture References

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” Psalm 100:4-5

“Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!” Psalm 117:1-2

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22-23

“I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart . . . and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness.” Psalm 138:1-2

“It is good to . . . sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night.”
Psalm 92:1-2

PRAISE GOD FOR MEETING OUR NEEDS

Though the people of Israel often failed to recognize God’s blessings in Old Testament times, the Psalmists frequently wrote hymns of praise for the wonderful ways in which He had provided for His chosen people. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, provided them with food and water in the wilderness, gave them the land of Canaan as an inheritance, saved them from their enemies, and provided them with many daily blessings. The persons who wrote the Psalms recalled God’s faithfulness in meeting their needs and expressed their praise in meaningful songs of praise which were sung in the temple and likely also in many homes.

Christians today have even more reasons to sing praise to God for His daily blessing, as they create their own hymns of praise and also join thousands of others in singing the songs of praise found in the Bible.

Scripture References

“Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. . . . who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free, the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless.” Psalm 146:1, 7-9

“The LORD upholds all those who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. . . . My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.” Psalm 145:14-16, 21

“Sing to God, sing praises to his name . . . Father of the fatherless and protector of widows. . . . God sets the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity.” Psalm 68:4-6

“Praise be to the LORD, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.” Psalm 68:19

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Philippians 4:19-20

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS SPECIAL BLESSINGS TO YOU

It’s a great privilege to join with others in singing and praying words of praise which you can share together. However, it is also a great privilege to be able to pray and sing praise to God for the special gifts of grace which He has given to you personally. Although we all share many of God’s blessings together, most of us have also been blessed in special ways in our personal or family lives.

Praising God in general terms for “all His blessings” is good and important, but it is also good, as the song writer challenged us, to “count our many blessings and name them one by one.” Just as God never seems to tire of giving us His abundant blessings, we should never tire of giving Him our heartfelt and sincere praise for those blessings—mentioning them thoughtfully, joyfully, and thankfully “one by one.”

Scripture References

“Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. . . . Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!” Psalm 66:16-20

“I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears . . . This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.” Psalm 34:4, 6

“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!” Psalm 30:11-12

“I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.” Psalm 40:1-3

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS WONDERFUL SALVATION

Of all the gifts which God gives us, none is greater or more significant than the gift of salvation. Without the assurance of living with our gracious Lord throughout eternity, the value and significance of our earthly blessings would be far less. Many people go through their early life with good health, abundant possessions, and relative freedom from pain, suffering, or distress. However, they do not have the blessed assurance of spending eternity with Jesus. Others experience numerous trials, frustrations, disappointments and hardships during their earthly pilgrimage but they have the comfort and joy of knowing that their Lord and Savior is preparing for them a place of perfect peace and unending happiness.

Scripture References

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Peter 1:3-5

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.” Ephesians 1:3-8

PRAISE GOD UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

It is usually much easier for us to sing God’s praises and offer Him our prayers of praise when things are going well for us. However, when we experience trials or difficulties, we can easily forget the undeserved blessings we received in the past and bemoan our present situation. That may be understandable, but it certainly is not appropriate. God does not change and His kindness does not change. Genuine praise should not fluctuate according to our circumstances, but should always be a significant part of our daily lives.

Scripture References

“Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live.” Psalm 63:3-4

“My praise is continually of you . . . My mouth is filled with your praise, and with your glory all the day.” Psalm 71:6, 8

“I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Psalm 34:1

“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.” Psalm 146:1-2

A CONCLUDING CHALLENGE

One of the most remarkable passages on praise in the Bible is found in Habakkuk 3:17-19. In the first part of his book, Habakkuk challenged the Lord with some pressing questions which deeply troubled him. During his “dialog” with the Lord, Habakkuk came to the rewarding realization that he did not have to have answers to all his questions before he could praise the Lord. When he began to focus on God rather than on his circumstances or his personal comfort, words of praise came naturally and easily. God was always worthy of praise and glory and honor—no matter what happened in his own life. Habakkuk was therefore able to conclude his message with this powerful and wonderful profession:

*“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
GOD, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the deer’s;
he makes me tread on my high places.”*

Habakkuk 3:17-19

LESSON SIX

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- Day 1 PRAISE GOD FOR HIS MIGHTY POWER
Exodus 15:1-18
- Day 2 PRAISE GOD FOR HIS MAJESTY, GLORY AND PROVISION
1 Chronicles 29:10-20
- Day 3 PRAISE GOD FOR HIS PROMISES AND FAITHFULNESS
Luke 1:46-55, 68-75
- Day 4 PRAISE GOD FOR HIS SALVATION AND GREATNESS
Isaiah 12:1-6
- Day 5 PRAISE GOD FOR HIS LOVE AND COMPASSION
Psalm 145:1-21
- Day 6 PRAISE GOD FOR HIS PROTECTION AND DELIVERANCE
Psalm 34:1-22
- Day 7 PRAISE GOD FOR HIS BLESSINGS IN CHRIST
Ephesians 1:3-14



LESSON SIX – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Psalms 146 through 150 all begin and end with the same words.
2. T F Psalm 148 calls for both angels and animals to praise the Lord.
3. T F If we weep over our trials and sorrows, God will not accept our words of “praise,” since they would not be genuine.
4. T F We can actually praise God by confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness.
5. T F Both Psalm 8 and Psalm 92 begin and end with the same sentence.
6. T F In the Old Testament expressions of praise to God for His work of creation are found only in the book of Genesis and in the Psalms.
7. T F Psalm 88 is one of the great psalms of praise in the Old Testament.
8. T F In the New Testament, there are many expressions of praise to God for His work of “re-creation” but none for His initial creation of the world.
9. T F God is praised as a ROCK in Psalm 18:2; 18:46; 42:9; 62:6; 86:15; and 144:1.
10. T F Even though it should be “natural” for believers to praise God, it is appropriate for us to ask God to help us bring Him praise.



MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1.
 - A. God is sovereign and wants us to praise Him in every situation, no matter what is happening in our lives.
 - B. God is realistic and does not expect us to praise Him when everything seems to be going wrong in our lives.
 - C. God is patient and is willing to wait for our praise until our problems are resolved.
2.
 - A. God is glorified even if we express words of praise that we do not really mean.
 - B. God is glorified only if we express words of praise that we genuinely mean and that are the true expressions of our mind and heart.
 - C. God is glorified only by our actions and not by our words.
3.
 - A. If we focus most of our “free time” on news, sports, and recreation, our “prayer life” will probably not be very strong.
 - B. The “strength” of our prayer life has little or nothing to do with how we spend our leisure time.
 - C. The strength of our prayer life will naturally vary greatly from one time to another and there is little or nothing we can do about it.
4. Where in the Bible do we find these words of praise? *“He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords . . . To him be honor and eternal dominion.”*
 - A. Revelation 19:5
 - B. Psalm 67:3, 5
 - C. I Timothy 6:15-16
5. Complete the following sentence from 1 Peter 2:9. “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession:
 - A. that you may enjoy the blessing of the Lord as long as you live.”
 - B. that you may run your race on earth with confidence and joy.”
 - C. that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness.”
6. What reason for praising God is given in Revelation 4:11?
 - A. God sent His Son into the world to save us from our sins.
 - B. God created all things.
 - C. God delivered His people from captivity.

7. Complete the following sentence from Psalm 72:19: "Blessed be his glorious name forever: . . .
- A. May all nations call him blessed!"
 - B. May the whole earth be filled with his glory!"
 - C. May his people delight in his mercy."
8. Psalm 100 is a well-known Psalm of praise to God. What reason is given in this Psalm for praising God?
- A. The Lord is good and His faithfulness endures to all generations.
 - B. Our God is more powerful than all other gods.
 - C. God graciously forgives all our sins.
9. Where in the Bible do we find these well-known words: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name."?
- A. Psalm 1
 - B. Psalm 103
 - C. Psalm 150
10. Psalm 103:1-14 gives us many reasons for praising God. Which of the following is NOT given in this passage as one of those reasons?
- A. God does not deal with us according to our sins.
 - B. God crowns us with steadfast love and mercy.
 - C. God keeps us from accidents and sickness.

LESSON SIX – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between praise and thanksgiving?
2. According to the notes in this Lesson, what should be the primary focus in our prayers?
3. Which of the following statements most accurately reflects the biblical teaching on praise?
 - A. We should always praise God, even when our circumstances are difficult or unpleasant.
 - B. God obviously does not expect us to praise Him when our circumstances are difficult or unpleasant.
 - C. If we weep over our trials and sorrows, God will not accept our efforts to praise Him.
4.
 - A. Is it possible to praise God by confessing our sins to Him?
 - B. Please explain your answer.

5. A. Psalms 146 through 150 all begin and end with the same words. What are they?
- B. Can you find any other Psalms which begin and end with those words (or with verysimilar words)?
6. In 2 Chronicles 20:13-19, we read that the people of Judah faced a huge army. They prayed to the Lord for help and He promised to help them.
- A. What did King Jehoshaphat do BEFORE the battle was even fought? See 2 Chronicles 20:18, 19 and 21.
- B. What was the result? See 2 Chronicles 20:22.
- C. Is there anything we can learn from this?
7. The Lesson lists five things that can help you make praise a more meaningful part of YOUR prayer life. List three of them that will be most helpful for you personally.
- A.
- B.
- C.
8. Complete the following sentence from 1 Peter 2:9.
- "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession _____
- _____."
9. Write out three verses which praise God for who He is. (You may choose verses provided in the Lesson or other verses which you find on your own.)
- A.
- B.
- C.
10. Psalm 8 begins and ends with the same sentence. Write out that sentence.

11.
 - A. What reason for praising God is given in Psalm 148:5?
 - B. What reason for praising God is given in Revelation 4:11?
 - C. What does Isaiah 40:28 teach us about God?
12. Complete the following sentences by filling in the blanks.
 - A. Psalm 96:1 "Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the LORD,
_____."
 - B. Psalm 72:19 "Blessed be his glorious name forever; may
_____ be filled with his glory."
 - C. Revelation 15:4 " _____ will come and worship
before you."
13. What does Psalm 66:1-4 teach about God's greatness and power?
14. List four of the wonderful blessings God gives His people according to Psalm 103:1-5.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
15. Psalm 33:1 reads: "Praise befits the upright." According to Psalm 33:4-5, why is it "fitting" for the upright to praise God?
16. There are several passages listed in the Lesson under the heading "Praise God for His Love and Faithfulness."
 - A. Write out TWO of the passages which are especially meaningful to you.
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - B. Why did you chose these two passages?

17. Psalm 146:1, 7-9 mentions several wonderful ways in which the Lord blesses His people. Write out five of them.
- A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
 - E.
18. A. What wonderful reason is given for praising God in Philippians 4:19-20?
- B. What reason for praise is given in Psalm 68:19?
19. Complete the following sentences by filling in the blanks.
- A. Psalm 63:3-4 "Because _____, my lips will praise you."
 - B. Psalm 34:1 "I will bless the Lord _____; his praise shall _____ be in my mouth."
 - C. Psalm 104:33 "I will sing to the Lord _____; I will sing praise to my God _____."
20. Two New Testament passages are listed in this Lesson under the heading "Praise God for His Wonderful Salvation."
- A. List (but do not write out) these two references.
 - B. Is either of these two passages especially precious to you? Please give the reason for your answer.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. There are many verses of praise in this Lesson. When you read all these verses, what was your reaction or response? For example, were you encouraged? Discouraged? Amazed? Humbled? Stimulated to praise God yourself? Or . . . something else? Please describe your reaction and the reason(s) why you reacted as you did.
2. How would you respond to someone who says that we cannot be expected to praise God when life is hard and difficult for us?
3. Write at least five things under the heading "I Praise God because" (But do not include here items which you include in your answer to question five below.)
4. Write out a paragraph of your own in the style and spirit of Habakkuk 3:17-19. For example, you might begin with, "I will praise the Lord even though . . ." and then you might end with, "My wonderful Lord is my strength and my hope. He will"
5. There are two passages listed in the Lesson which praise God for His wonderful salvation. Write a paragraph of your own in which you praise God for saving YOU.
6. What do you think the author of Psalm 66:4 had in mind when he wrote this verse? Was he exaggerating? Was he realistic? Would his words be true in today's world?
7. What would you say to someone who says that it might be "appropriate" to include praise in our prayers but it certainly is not 'necessary'?
8. Do you find anything of "praise" in Psalm 88? If so, where is it found? If not, does this mean that God accepts our prayers even when we are too discouraged to bring Him praise?
9. Do you think God "takes pleasure" in the words of praise expressed by people who do not live a life of trust and obedience? Please explain your answer.
10. If you usually do not include many words of praise in your prayers, why do you think that is so? Do you think you should include more sincere praise in your prayers? If so, how will you go about doing that in a meaningful way in the future?

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

Lesson Seven

PRAYER

Introduction

Some of the most moving prayers in the Bible are prayers of confession. And it's easy to understand why. When we take a serious look at our lives in the light of the Bible, most of us recognize that we fall far short of being the kind of persons God wants us to be. When we consider the perfect purity and holiness of God, we, like Isaiah the prophet, recognize how impure and unholy we ourselves are (Isaiah 6:1-5).

When we remember that God commands us to love Him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength (Matthew 22:36-38), we realize how often we fail to do that. And when we remember that God also commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39), we recognize that we often fail to do that, too.

Prayers of confession are therefore very necessary and important. But they are also very humbling for us. Whenever we sincerely confess our sins we are reminded of our weaknesses, our failures and our foolish pride. And most of the time we do not like to be reminded of that. We would like to believe that we are able to live above the temptations in the world which draw us away from God and the paths of righteousness. But an honest examination of ourselves causes us to face who we really are. And that can make sincere confession very difficult and very unpleasant.

But praying honestly and humbly about our failures and sins is both biblical and important. In this Lesson, therefore, we will take a careful look at prayers of confession in the light of what the Bible teaches us. We will look briefly at the NECESSITY of Confession, the PURPOSE of Confession, the RESULTS of Confession, and QUESTIONS about confession.

[Note: The Bible includes some very moving prayers of confession of national sins or sins committed by large numbers of people. Some of those prayers are included in the Scripture verses cited in this Lesson. However, the primary focus in this Lesson is on personal or individual sins.]

THE NECESSITY OF CONFESSION

When we confess our sins to God we acknowledge that we have broken His laws, that we have failed to do His will, that we have hurt or offended Him or others, and that we did not always think, respond, or speak the way He wanted us to. We also acknowledge that at times we have left undone things we should have done and left unspoken things we should have said. And we acknowledge that on too many occasions we have lived according to the flesh and failed to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

When we confess our sins to God we obviously do not tell God something He doesn't already know. God knows all our failures and transgressions and sins far better than we do. However, when we confess those failures and sins to Him, we agree with Him that we have failed to be the kind of people He wants us to be. We also acknowledge that there may well be other sins in our lives which we are not even aware of.

When we pray, we must not only confess sinful deeds but also any sinful thoughts or words or attitudes we might have. We must also confess anything in our lives that brings dishonor to the name of Christ or harm to His cause. And we must confess the times that we have hurt or wounded others through our words, actions, or attitudes.

The list of possible sins is very, very long: pride, arrogance, selfishness, lust, greed, racial prejudice, lying, hatred, impurity, injustice, lack of love for others, an unforgiving spirit, indifference to the needs of the poor, excessive love of things, a lack of concern for those who are spiritually lost, insensitivity to the feelings of others, disobedience to those in authority, and so many other things.

When we confess our sins before God, we must make sure that we humbly and honestly confess specific sins by name. It is not enough simply to confess that we are sinners. We must humbly acknowledge each sin that we can think of and bring it before the Lord in sincerity and repentance.

Repentance is very significant. It is of little value to confess our sins if we are not genuinely sorry for them. And it is of little value to be sorry for our sins if we do not earnestly desire and intend, with God's help, to overcome temptation and sin in the future.

We know, of course, that we will have to fight against sin and temptation as long as we live. However, we also know that God promises to help us win a victory over temptation so that we may live a life that increasingly honors and glorifies Him (1 John 3:6, 9; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Corinthians 10:31).

We should therefore never be satisfied simply to confess our sins, but our confession of past sins should also lead us to seek to overcome our weaknesses and to serve God more faithfully in the future.

God graciously enables us to do His will when we truly seek to serve Jesus as our Lord and joyfully submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit (Philippians 2:12-15; Galatians 5:16). However, we must also recognize that even our best efforts fail to meet God's absolute requirement of perfect love and obedience.

That's why we must continue to pray daily as Jesus taught us: "And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:12-13).

Additional Scripture References

"None is righteous, no not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Romans 3:10-12

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Ephesians 2:1-3

"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." Psalm 51:4

“Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! . . . Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.” Psalm 143:1-2

THE PURPOSE OF CONFESSION

There are several reasons why we should confess our sins before God—even when it is painful or unpleasant for us to do so.

- (1) By acknowledging and confessing our sins, we remind ourselves (and others) of the power of sin and evil and the importance of constantly being on guard against it. (1 Corinthians 10:6-12).
- (2) Our sins create a barrier between God and ourselves which must be removed if we want Him to continue to bless us and answer our prayers. (Psalm 66:18).
- (3) Our sins not only create a barrier between us and God but they also can create a barrier between ourselves and others. Honest confession and sincere repentance help remove those barriers so that we may again enjoy fellowship with one another and live in harmony and peace with one another. (Romans 14:19; Hebrews 12:14).
- (4) Confession and repentance are God’s appointed way to the forgiveness of our sins. If we fail to confess our sins and do not sincerely repent of them, we cannot expect God to forgive them. (Psalm 32:1-5; Proverbs 28:13).
- (5) Since our sins bring dishonor to the Lord and His cause, our confession and repentance may help to restore His honor in a world which is often very skeptical about Christianity and the claims of believers. When we confess our sins and find forgiveness, we teach others about the frailty of mankind and the greatness of God’s mercy and compassion. (Psalm 103:8-14).
- (6) When we find forgiveness through confession and repentance, our experience can serve as a witness to others how *their* sins can be forgiven, too (1 Timothy 1:12-16).

Regrettably, instead of confessing our failures and sins, we often try to make an excuse for them. Even when we recognize that we have done wrong, we try to shift the blame for our sin to someone or something else.

We may then talk about our poor upbringing, poor role models in our lives, “bad genes” (which allegedly lead us to addictions of one kind or another), difficult circumstances, loss of health, loss of a job, unusual temptations, poor self-image, or some other problem or concern.

Any or all of these things may well provide a plausible “reason” why we sinned, but they do not provide an “excuse” for our sin. We may try to minimize our guilt and wrongdoing and even be successful in persuading others that we are not to blame for what we have done, but God knows our hearts and He is the one to whom we must give an account (Hebrews 4:13).

So, instead of seeking to minimize our sin and guilt, we should seek to maximize God’s grace and forgiveness. It is far better to cast ourselves on the mercy of God than to make excuses for what we have done or try to make ourselves look better than we really are.

Since God is willing to forgive every sin of every repentant sinner who truly trusts in Christ, let us come to Him with boldness rather than running away from Him in fear (Genesis 3:8; Hebrews 4:15-16).

Scripture References

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!”
Psalm 51:1-2

“So Moses went back to the Lord and said, ‘Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin’” Exodus 32:31-32

“Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love.” Numbers 14:19

“Acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the LORD your God . . . and that you have not obeyed my voice, declares the Lord. . . . Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 3:13-14

“If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin . . . and if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart . . . then hear in heaven your dwelling place . . . and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you.” 1 Kings 8:46-50

THE RESULTS OF CONFESSION

Whenever we humbly confess our sins and sincerely believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for those sins, God will graciously and completely forgive every sin we have ever committed. Our relationship with God will be restored, our guilt will be taken away, we will have peace in our hearts, and we will be assured of having an eternal home in heaven with our Savior.

Also, when we confess our sins and find forgiveness for them, we are freed from the burden of a guilty conscience. Daily living with unconfessed sin can be very costly. Many who fail to acknowledge or confess their sins suffer from physical or psychological problems. Some live with a heavy heart, a feeling of unworthiness, distrust of others, fear of punishment, and deep depression or anxiety. Not everyone who lives with unconfessed sin will experience all of these things, but many do. As the Bible teaches, “*There is no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked*” (Isaiah 48:22).

David personally experienced the blessing and joy that came from confessing his sin after living for a year or so with unconfessed sin in his life. He wrote, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me, my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’—and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:4-5).

When a person confesses his sin and finds complete forgiveness from the Lord, he not only experiences a deep joy in the Lord, but he also finds delight in doing the will of God. The grace of God which forgives him also gives him the power and strength to live a life that brings glory to the Lord and blessing to others. As David wrote in Psalm 51:7-13:

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.”

Additional Scripture References

“If we say we have no sins we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:8-9

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” Psalm 32:1-2

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity. . . . He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as afar as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:2-3, 9-12

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

QUESTIONS RELATED TO CONFESSION

1. WHEN should we confess our sins to the Lord?

We should confess our sins as soon we become aware of them. We should not put off confessing our sins until we go to bed or when we are at a prayer meeting or a church service or when we find ourselves in a “better mood.” We should confess our sins immediately, sincerely repent of them, and then humbly ask God for His forgiveness.

Usually, the longer we wait to confess our sins, the more significant the results of those sins will be. Sins which are not confessed and forgiven often have a ripple effect which continues on and on until the sin is dealt with. We should therefore humbly confess our sins without delay, make amends where we can, and trust in the Lord for His mercy and grace.

Scripture References

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” Proverbs 28:13

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah 55:6-7

“Now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”
2 Corinthians 6:2

2. **TO WHOM** should we confess our sins?

Our prayers of confession should be offered directly to God, since only He can forgive our sins (Mark 2:7; Isaiah 43:25). However, there may be times where it is helpful for us to confess our sins to others so that they can help us find forgiveness and peace from God by directing us to God’s promises in the Bible. (See Matthew 16:19; John 23:22-23.)

There may also be situations when it is helpful to confess our sins to others when such a confession would help provide physical healing or restore broken relationships. (See James 5:16; 2 Corinthians 2:10.)

We should also confess our sins to others when we need to ask their forgiveness if we have hurt them or offended them. (See Genesis 50:15-17; 1 Samuel 25:28; Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21-22, 35.)

3. **SHOULD WE REPEATEDLY** CONFESS our sins whenever we think about them—even if we have confessed those sins before? Or should we confess our sins only once and then never be concerned about them again?

The answer to this question will depend on our personal circumstances. If we are not sure that past sins have definitely been forgiven, we should sincerely confess them again and then humbly claim God’s forgiveness on the basis of Christ’s redemptive work on our behalf. However, if we are confident that our earlier confession was sincere, and if we have truly put our trust in Jesus as our Savior, we may quiet our conscience with the assurance that the blood of Jesus, God’s Son, *has* cleansed us from every sin (1 John 1:9). It will then not be necessary to confess past sins all over again.

However, even though it is not necessary to confess sins that have already been forgiven, we may still benefit from “reflecting” on those sins whenever they come to mind. Doing so can benefit us in a number of ways.

- (1) Our remembrance of past sins may help us to stay away from the people or situations that led us into sin in the past or that could easily lead us into sin in the future.
- (2) Remembrance of past sins can prompt us to thank God again for His love and mercy in forgiving those sins.
- (3) Remembrance of past sins may encourage us to warn others who might also be easily led into those same sins.
- (4) Remembrance of our own sins may help us deal patiently and compassionately with others who have already fallen into similar sins.

Scripture References

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7

“Let us draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” Hebrews 10:22

“Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression . . .? He does not retain his anger forever; because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Micah 7:18-19

“In [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace.” Ephesians 1:7

4. IS THERE A SPECIAL **PLACE** where we should confession our sins?

No. We can confess our sins wherever we are. We do not need to be in a church or in a “prayer room” or in any other special place in order to bring our sins before the Lord and ask for His forgiveness. As long as our hearts and minds are humble and contrite before the Lord, it does not matter where we are physically. However, there may be times when we feel it is appropriate to confess our sins (either publicly or privately) in church or in some other special place. This is certainly acceptable even though it is not necessary.

Scripture References

“Listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place [the temple]. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.” 1 Kings 8:30

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. . . . the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and said, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner.’” Luke 18:10, 13

5. SHOULD WE CONFESS OUR SINS **PUBLICLY** OR ONLY IN PRIVATE?

Generally, private confession is all that is necessary. However, if our sins are publicly known to many people, it may be important that these people also know that we have confessed our sins before the Lord and that we have humbly asked His forgiveness. Also, if our sins have negatively affected a number of other people, it may be helpful if these people know that we have repented of those sins and confessed them before the Lord. At times, therefore, it may be necessary or desirable to confess public sins in a public place—such as a church or Bible study group or in some other appropriate place.

However, if our sins are not known to others, it is usually better not to confess those sins in public unless we are very confident that the Lord would truly be glorified by such a confession and confident that others would benefit from hearing it.

For example, someone might struggle with the sin of drunkenness or gambling or pornography without anyone else being aware of it. If this person finds forgiveness from past sins and victory over those sins, a public confession could possibly help others who are struggling with the same sins.

However, if there is any uncertainty about the response of people to such a confession, it will usually be better for the repentant person to rejoice in his victory without sharing that victory with others in a public setting.

It is also important to remember that people sometimes take a sinful delight in hearing about the lurid stories or perverse behavior of others. When that happens, there is a real danger that too much emphasis is put

on the sinner and his sin rather than on God and His grace. We must always seek the guidance of the Lord, therefore, as we seek to know when and whether and how we should confess our sins in public

Scripture References

“The people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. And the Israelites . . . stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.” Nehemiah 9:1-3 (See also Ezra 9:5-15; Isaiah 59:9-15; Daniel 9:4-19.)

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. . . . But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Matthew 6:16-18

[Though confession of sins is not mentioned in these verses, what is said here about fasting would seem to apply also to prayers of confession.]

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Though many people emphasize what they call the “essential goodness” of man, most people recognize that our world is full of unfaithfulness, deceitfulness, failure and wrongdoing of every kind. It’s not surprising, therefore, to find that most religions teach the necessity and importance of confession.

It is only Christianity, however, which offers a meaningful solution to our sin problem. The Bible teaches us how all our sins and failures can be completely and fully forgiven—no matter how serious or how numerous they are. We can be absolutely SURE that our sins are forgiven—not because of our own works or worthiness, but because Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, has paid the penalty for our sins through His sacrificial death on the cross.

When confession and repentance are accompanied by genuine faith in Jesus, we may have the wonderfully blessed assurance that our sins are

completely forgiven and that we will spend eternity in glory with Him and with all those who have been redeemed through Him.

Confession of sin, therefore, is not only a biblical command but also a tremendous privilege. By God's grace, the humble and sincere confession of our sins serves as the divinely-appointed gateway to a rich and unending treasure of forgiveness, joy, and peace.

This precious truth is summarized in the beautiful hymn, *Wonderful Grace of Jesus*.

*Wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin—
How shall my tongue describe it, where shall its praise begin?
Taking away my burden, setting my spirit free,
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me!*

*Wonderful grace of Jesus, reaching the most defiled,
By its transforming power making me God's dear child,
Purchasing peace and heaven for all eternity,
And the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me!*

*Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,
deeper than the mighty rolling sea,
higher than the mountain,
sparkling like a fountain,
all sufficient grace for even me.*

*Broader than the scope of my transgressions,
Greater far than all my sin and shame;
O magnify the precious name of Jesus.
Praise His name!*

Haldor Lillenas

LESSON SEVEN

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Day 1 THE PRAYER OF EZRA

Ezra 9:6-15

Day 2 THE PRAYER OF DAVID

Psalms 51:1-17

Day 3 THE PRAYER OF DANIEL

Daniel 9:4-9

Day 4 THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah 1:4-10

Day 5 THE PRAYER OF SOLOMON

2 Chronicles 6:22-31, 36-39

Day 6 THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah 9:26-37

Day 7 THE PRAYERS OF MOSES

Exodus 32:9-14, Exodus 34:8-9; Deuteronomy 9:25-29



LESSON SEVEN – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Since the blood of Jesus covers all our sins, it is not necessary to confess specific sins.
2. T F Since the confession of our sins is often humbling, we should not encourage Christians to confess their sins while they are struggling to grow in their faith.
3. T F God will forgive only those sins which we remember and specifically confess to Him.
4. T F Romans 3:23 teaches that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
5. T F If we deliberately choose not to confess our sins and if we do not genuinely repent of them, we cannot expect God to forgive them.
6. T F It is better to cast ourselves on the mercy and grace of God than to make excuses for what we have done and try to make ourselves look better than we really are.
7. T F The promise that “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” is found in 1 Peter 3:18.
8. T F There are times when it may be helpful to confess our sins to others if that could help provide healing or restoration.
9. T F The message that “God does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love” is found in Micah 7:18.
10. T F All true believers eventually reach a point in their spiritual growth on earth when they no longer have to confess their sins before God.



MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1.
 - A. God knows all about our actions, but He does not know our secret thoughts and desires.
 - B. God knows everything about us, so there is nothing we can hide from Him.
 - C. There is no need to confess specific sins to God, since He already knows all about them.
2.
 - A. We should confess our sins to God as soon as we are aware of them.
 - B. If we confess our sins too soon, we obviously are not taking them very seriously.
 - C. We should not confess our sins until we realize all the possible effects of those sins.
3.
 - A. Since only God can forgive our sins, we should never confess our sins to human beings.
 - B. There are times when fellow believers can help us find forgiveness and peace with God.
 - C. Pastors and priests can grant us forgiveness as God's representatives.
4.
 - A. After we are assured of forgiveness, it is best to forget our sins and remember them no more.
 - B. We should confess past sins repeatedly to make sure that we are truly forgiven.
 - C. By remembering our own past sins we may be able to help others who are wrestling with their own weaknesses and temptations.
5. Where in the Bible do we find this verse? "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."
 - A. Psalm 32:1
 - B. Isaiah 64:9
 - C. Proverbs 28:13
6. Which of the following Scripture references (book, chapter and verse) is not correct?
 - A. "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13
 - B. "The blood of Jesus . . . purifies us from all sin." Romans 5:6
 - C. "There is no one righteous, not even one." Romans 3:10

7. In Exodus 34:8-9 we read:
- A. Moses said: "It is a stiff-necked people . . . pardon their iniquity and their sin."
 - B. Moses said: "It is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin."
 - C. Moses said: "It is a stiff-necked people, do not pardon them any longer."
8. Which of the following is NOT correct?
- A. In 1 Kings 8:46 Solomon said that there is no one who does not sin.
 - B. In Exodus 32:31-32 Moses asked God to forgive the sins of His people because they did not know what they were doing.
 - C. In Numbers 14:19 Moses asked God to forgive the people in accordance with His great love.
9. In Psalm 51 we read David's prayer of confession. In this Psalm:
- A. David confessed his sins before God and made no excuses for them.
 - B. David admitted he had sinned but asserted that he was tricked into committing those sins.
 - C. David admitted his sins but also felt that he should not be punished for them because he was not worse than others who committed the same sins.
10. Which of the following does NOT take place when we humbly and sincerely confess our sins and trust in Jesus to forgive us?
- A. We are assured that God will keep us from committing those sins in the future.
 - B. We are assured that our sins are forgiven and that our relationship to God is restored.
 - C. We have joy in being forgiven and have peace in our hearts.



LESSON SEVEN – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. A. According to Matthew 22:37-38, what is the “first and greatest commandment”?
B. What is the second great commandment? Matthew 22:39
2. Why is it humbling for us to confess our sins before God?
3. A. Do you agree with the following statement?
“The only sins we have to confess to God are the sins we know about.”
B. Please give the reason for your answer.
4. A. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement?
“It isn’t necessary for us to confess specific sins as long as we sincerely confess before God that we know that we are sinners.”
B. Please give the reason for your answer.
5. What does 1 Corinthians 10:13 teach us about temptation?
6. Write out two verses from the Bible that teaches that EVERYONE is sinful by nature.
A.

B.
7. Write out three reasons why it is important for us to confess our sins to God.
A.

B.

C.
8. People sometimes try to hide their sins from God. What does Hebrews 4:13 teach about that?
9. Complete the following statement from Proverbs 28:13. “Whoever conceals his transgressions _____, but he who confesses and forsakes them _____.”
10. According to Isaiah 59:2, why did God not listen to the prayers of His people?

11. Which of the following statements is most correct?
- A. If we can give a good “reason” why we sinned, God will usually accept that as an excuse for our sin.
 - B. If others tempted us to sin and we gave in to the temptation, the person who tempted us to sin should receive the punishment for our failure.
 - C. We should confess our sins before God and make no excuses for them.
12. Two of the following statements are true. Which ones are they?
- A. In 1 Kings 8:46 Solomon said that there is no one who does not sin.
 - B. In Psalm 85:2-3 we read that God was willing to forgive most of the sins of the people, but not all of them because they were stubborn and rebellious.
 - C. In Exodus 32:31-32 Moses asked God to forgive the sins of the people because they did not know what they were doing.
 - D. In Numbers 14:19-20 Moses asked God to forgive the people in accordance with His great love.
13. Write out four blessings that result if we humbly and sincerely confess our sins, repent of them, and then trust in Jesus for our salvation.
- A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
14. Write out three verses about the *blessing* of forgiveness which are especially meaningful to you. (You may choose from the verses cited in the Lesson or choose others of your own.)
- A.
 - B.
 - C.

15. David waited a long time before he confessed his sins of adultery and “murder.” (See 2 Samuel 11.) What was going on in his life between the time when he committed those sins and the time when he confessed those sins? See Psalm 32:3-4.
16. A. Is it necessary for us to confess our sins to a religious leader in order for us to find forgiveness from God?
- B. Are there any times when it might be helpful for us to confess our sins to a religious leader or some other mature Christian? Please explain your answer.
17. Write out three reasons why we may benefit from reflecting on past sins—even if we know those sins have been forgiven.
- A.
- B.
- C.
18. Write out two passages which give us great assurance that our sins are truly forgiven when we confess them, repent for having done them, and trust in Christ to forgive them.
- A.
- B.
19. Evaluate the following sentence: “It is never wise or desirable for us to confess any of our sins in public.”
20. The Lesson notes indicate that confessing our sins is a “tremendous privilege” as well as a biblical command. Would you agree? Please explain your answer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Once in a while we meet people who claim they have not really done anything wrong and therefore do not need to confess anything. How would you respond to such a person?
2. What is the difference between “being” guilty and “feeling” guilty? Is it possible to be guilty without feeling guilty? Is it possible to feel guilty without being guilty? Please explain your answer.
3. Might it be better and more productive if, instead of emphasizing our sins, we emphasized more the kind of life we can and should live if we followed the leading of the Holy Spirit? Please explain your answer.
4. As a person matures in his or her Christian life, do you think this person will become more sensitive to sin or less so? Please explain your answer.
5. What are some of your favorite songs or poems or other writings which reflect your personal sentiments on the subject of confession and forgiveness?



PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

Lesson Eight

PRAYER

Introduction

As Christians we have more reason than anyone else to give thanks to the Lord. Whether or not we have an abundance of material and physical blessings—and many of us do—all of us have a secure eternal future that is glorious beyond description and can never be taken away from us (1 Peter 1:3-5). We also have the assurance that God works out everything in our lives for our ultimate good, no matter how challenging or difficult our life circumstances may be (Romans 8:18 and 28).

In addition, we have the promise that God “who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” will also “with him graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:32). And nothing, Paul wrote, “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39).

It is against the background of those wonderful promises and certainties that Paul wrote to believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*”

This does not mean that life will always be easy and pleasant for us (see Romans 8:23), but even in the midst of life’s most difficult situations, we can still rejoice in the Lord and give Him thanks. As Paul reminded us:

“This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

When we focus on what is eternal we are able to sing and make melody to the Lord, *“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 5:20).

True thanksgiving, therefore, is not based upon our external circumstances but rather upon a right understanding of God and His relationship to us, His children.

Without that understanding, it would be almost impossible for us to maintain a positive attitude and a peaceful spirit in the midst of life’s trials and disappointments. But because we know that God is not only sovereign but also loving and gracious, we have good reason to have a positive and thankful attitude whether we have many or few earthly possessions in this world.

As we give our thanks and gifts to the Lord, our generosity results in further thanksgiving on the part of others (2 Corinthians 9:11-12).
As we live and give and pray with thankfulness, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

In the Bible thanksgiving and praise are often referred to in the same verse or in the same passage. People whose hearts were filled with thanksgiving to God also praised God because of who He is and because of what He had done. Sometimes the praise and thanksgiving were given by individuals but very often people gathered together publicly in the temple to sing and bring their heartfelt thanks and praise to “the One from who all blessings flow.”

Scripture References

King Hezekiah assigned priests and Levites *“to minister in the gates of the camp of the LORD and to give thanks and praise.”*
2 Chronicles 31:2

“They sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, ‘For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.’” Ezra 3:11

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!” Psalm 100:4

“Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.”
Psalm 106:47

GIVING THANKS TO GOD FOR HIS LOVE AND PROVISION

Many times people offered thanks to God for some wonderful blessings of love and grace without mentioning specific details of the blessings they had received. Such general expressions of thanks were an indication that the people giving the thanks were fully aware that everything they had and enjoyed was possible only because of the kindness and goodness of their Lord.

Scripture References

“Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!” 1 Chronicles 16:8; Psalm 105:1; Isaiah 12:4

“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness . . . O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!” Psalm 30:11-12

“O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!” Psalm 118:1-5

(The expression *“for his steadfast love endures forever”* is found in all twenty-six verses of Psalm 136. In this Psalm, most verses refer to some specific activity of God which demonstrates that steadfast love.)

GIVING THANKS FOR PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL BLESSINGS

There are not many stories in either the Old or New Testament in which individuals say “Thank You” to God for specific physical or material blessings (such as food, clothing, health, shelter, or protection), but there are many passages which refer in one way or another to the “giving of thanks” both in public worship and in the personal lives of individuals. See, for example, 2 Chronicles 7:3; 31:2; Ezra 3:11; Nehemiah 11:17; 12:24, 27, 31; Psalm 42:4; 69:30; 95:2. Though some people may have failed to recognize or acknowledge God as the ultimate source of their blessings, God’s faithful people joyfully acknowledged that every blessing they received came from the hand of the Lord.

Old Testament References

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped . . . with my song I give thanks to him.” Psalm 28:7

“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; . . . O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!” Psalm 30:11-12

“Both riches and honor come from you . . . and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.” 1 Chronicles 29:12-13

“Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.” Psalm 106:47

“They cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress . . . Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!” Psalm 107:13-15

New Testament References

After Jesus healed ten lepers, *“one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks.” Luke 17:15-16*

When Paul was being brought as a prisoner to Rome in a ship, the people on the ship did not eat for many days because of some terrible storms. Paul told the people that God promised to bring them safely to shore. *“And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat.” Acts 27:35*

“Everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.” 1 Timothy 4:4

“[God] delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.” 2 Corinthians 1:10-11

GIVING THANKS FOR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

We should always be thankful to the Lord for every blessing we receive from Him. However, we should be especially thankful for the spiritual blessings He gives us. God is faithful to all His covenant promises and continues to uphold us, guide us, love us, forgive us, and fulfill His promises of grace to us. No matter what our earthly circumstances may be, we have the assurance that we will someday be with the Lord forever in glory, far beyond the reach of sin, suffering, frustration or disappointment.

Old Testament References

“I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart. . . . He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name.” Psalm 111:1, 9

“I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.” Psalm 118:21

“O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! Save us, O God of our salvation . . . that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting!”
1 Chronicles 16:34-36

New Testament References

“We always thank God . . . when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.” Colossians 1:3

“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Corinthians 1:4

“And we also thank God constantly for this that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God.”
2 Thessalonians 2:13

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.” 2 Thessalonians 1:3

GIVING THANKS FOR GOD'S BLESSINGS IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS

When Paul wrote his letters to the churches, he frequently thanked God for them and for what God had done in them and through them. Paul worked diligently and faithfully and even sacrificially, but he recognized that God Himself was the giver of the blessings that the people received and it was God who should receive the thanks for those blessings.

"I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world." Romans 1:8

"But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed." Romans 6:17

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." Philippians 1:3-5

"I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints." Philemon 4-5

GIVING THANKS IN HEAVEN

God's people will continue to thank and praise Him in heaven—as some are already doing now and as all believers will do throughout eternity.

"And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'" Revelation 7:11-12

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign." Revelation 11:17

GIVING THANKS IN MANY WAYS

We probably express our thanks to God most often in spoken words. However, we can also express our thanks through music, through thank offerings, through acts of service, through the giving of gifts, and in other creative ways. Though these may not be viewed as “prayers,” they are sincere and thoughtful expressions of thanksgiving to the One who is the ultimate source of every blessing we enjoy.

Giving thanks in music and song

Believers in Bible times frequently expressed their thanks through both vocal and instrumental music. Believers have continued to do that in virtually every culture and in every place where Christ is honored.

“At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.” Nehemiah 12:27

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults and with my song I give thanks to him.” Psalm 28:7

“Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!” Psalm 95:2

“[Address] one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 5:19-20

Giving thanks through sacrifices and offerings

In Old Testament times people presented thank offerings to the Lord on special occasions. These offerings were usually brought to the Temple along with other sacrifices. (See Leviticus 7:11-15.) Most of the time these thank offerings were likely accompanied by prayers of thanksgiving.

“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving” Psalm 50:14

“I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD.” Psalm 116:17

“And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!” Psalm 107:22

General expressions of thanksgiving

“[Give] thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” Ephesians 5:20

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Philippians 4:6

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:17

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:18

JESUS’ PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

There were many times when Jesus gave thanks to His Father in heaven, thereby setting an example for His disciples and also for us today.

“[Jesus] took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.” Matthew 15:36

(See also Matthew 14:19; Mark 8:6-7; Luke 9:16; Luke 24:30; John 6:11, 23.)

At the Last Supper, *“[Jesus] took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you.’” Matthew 26:27*

(See also Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17-19; 1 Corinthians 11:24.)

At the grave of Lazarus, *“Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me.’” John 11:41*

GIVING THANKS FOR HURTS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

It usually is easy for us to thank God for the wonderful ways He blesses us and provides for us. We know that everything we have is a gift of His love and a token of His grace.

However, if we remember the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:20 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18, we know that we should also give God thanks under all circumstances and at all times—whether those situations are pleasant or not. That is usually much more difficult for us to do. However, when we remember that God graciously uses ALL things for our spiritual benefit, we can also thank Him for using difficult and unpleasant times in our lives to make us better and stronger and holier people—even when we do not immediately understand why God permits some things to happen as they do.

Scripture References

“Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law.” Psalm 94:12

“It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.” Psalm 119:71

“I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.” Psalm 119:75

“[God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Hebrews 12:10-11

If trials and disappointments help us to stay on the narrow road that leads to eternal life, then we surely can thank God for those trials even in the midst of sorrow and tears. Because He is our gracious and loving Father, we can be confident that He will always do only that which He knows is truly best for us.

August Storm reflected those truths in a thanksgiving hymn that includes these lines:

*“Thanks for roses by the way-side
Thanks for thorns their stems contain.
Thanks for joy and thanks for sadness,
Thanks for sorrow and for pain.*

*Thanks for storms that I have weathered
Thanks for all you have supplied.
Thanks for happiness and pleasure
Thanks for staying by my side.”*

NEGLECTING TO GIVE THANKS

Some people tend to take their blessings for granted. They either neglect or refuse to recognize God in their lives and never or rarely give Him thanks for all the blessings He gives them. Instead of thanking God for protection or healing or mercy or success, they applaud themselves for their own ability or possibly thank their “lucky stars” for the good things that happen in their lives.

As a result, many of them become proud, arrogant, and ungrateful. And in their self-centeredness, they give no thanks to God, taking all honor and glory to themselves.

There are two special passages in the New Testament where we are reminded how many people fail to thank God for His gifts of mercy and grace.

At one point in Jesus’ ministry (described in Luke 17:11-17), ten desperate lepers approached Him at a distance and “lifted up their voices saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’”

Jesus graciously granted the lepers the healing they asked for—a healing which they knew they would never find in any other way. When the lepers realized that they were healed, they went on their way to the priest as required. However, one of the men, a despised Samaritan, turned back “praising God with a loud voice. And he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks.”

When Jesus looked at the one who gave thanks, he said to him: “‘Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’” Luke 17:11-17

We never read in the Bible what happened to the men who had been healed. Did they ever realize how thoughtless they had been and later return to give thanks to Jesus? We simply do not know. But we do know that Jesus was apparently both surprised and offended at their ingratitude. We also know that Jesus was pleased with the one person who returned to give Him thanks and sent him off with His “second” special blessing of grace.

Regrettably, the nine healed lepers were not the only ones who receive God’s gracious blessings but fail to acknowledge Him or give Him thanks. Sometime after Jesus’ encounter with the ten lepers, Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome about others who had received God’s blessings but neglected to thank Him for them. He wrote:

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Romans 1:21

Regrettably, multitudes of people around the world continue to enjoy God’s blessings of sunshine, rain, food, shelter, protection, safety, fun, good times, and so much more—without ever acknowledging or even recognizing God as the giver of those blessings. But as believers we want to honor God by acknowledging that every blessing we enjoy is a gift of His grace. And we especially want to thank Him for the innumerable spiritual blessings which are ours only by His sovereign grace and eternal love.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As our Heavenly Father, God is our Provider, our Protector, our Shepherd, our Savior, and our Friend. He knows all our needs of body, mind, and spirit, and He alone can provide for all our needs. He can protect us from our enemies, keep us from harm, give healing to our bodies, provide peace for our minds and turn evil into good. And He can forgive all our sins and give us the assurance of eternal life.

Because of His wondrous works of grace and love, God desires and expects us to express our gratitude through sincere and faithful prayers of thanksgiving and also by living lives of humble trust and obedience.

We should all humbly and faithfully reflect on His grace and goodness, so that we will increasingly develop a life of genuine and sincere gratitude. And as our gratitude increases we will increasingly express that gratitude in sincere prayers of humble and heartfelt thanksgiving.

LESSON EIGHT

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

PSALMS OF THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

- Day 1 Psalm 136
Day 2 Psalm 147
Day 3 Psalm 106:1-5, 44-48
Day 4 Psalm 96
Day 5 Psalm 107
Day 6 Psalm 105:1-15, 37-45
Day 7 Psalm 145



LESSON EIGHT – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:18: *“Give thanks when you realize how blessed you are.”*
2. T F Our giving of thanks is very pleasing to God, but He neither expects it nor requires it.
3. T F Romans 8:39 assures us that nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which we have in Christ Jesus our Lord.
4. T F The churches of Macedonia lost the joy of thankfulness because of their poverty. (See 2 Corinthians 8:1-7.)
5. T F 1 Thessalonians 5:18 teaches that we should be thankful under all circumstances.
6. T F If we truly have a thankful and humble heart, the Lord will keep us from having to deal with unpleasant or difficult circumstances.

7. T F In the Old Testament, the King refused to let the priests and Levites give thanks to God and to sing His praises at the gates of the temple. (See 2 Chronicles 31:2.)
8. T F People in Bible times not only PRAISED God for His wonderful attributes but they also THANKED Him for them.
9. T F Paul taught the Ephesian Christians in Ephesians 5 to always give thanks to God for everything in the name of Jesus.
10. T F We will never be able to give God sincere thanks unless we are confident that we understand why He does what He does.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1. What promise does God give us in Romans 8:28?
- A. God will keep His people from most of the troubles and problems which unbelievers have.
 - B. God works all things for the good of those who love Him.
 - C. God will never let His people suffer more than they deserve.
2. Read Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, and 31. These four verses are:
- A. Very much the same.
 - B. Exactly the same.
 - C. Exactly the same the same except for one major difference.
3. According to 2 Corinthians 4:17, why should we always be thankful in spite of our problems?
- A. Because our problems are preparing us for eternal glory.
 - B. Because our problems are not as serious as we make them out to be.
 - C. Because our problems are not any worse than those of most others.
4. In Philippians 4:6 Paul writes:
- A. Let your requests be made known to God with thanksgiving.
 - B. Let your requests be made known to God with humility.
 - C. Let your requests be made known to God with sincerity.

5. In Daniel 2:23, Daniel thanked God for giving him:
- A. Courage and strength.
 - B. Boldness and fearlessness.
 - C. Wisdom and might.
6. Psalm 136:1 reads: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good" and then ends with these six words: "for his steadfast love endures forever." How often do these six words occur in this Psalm?
- A. Six times
 - B. Sixteen times
 - C. Twenty-six times
7. Why did Paul give thanks to God for the church in Rome? (See Romans 1.)
- A. Because they were generous to the poor and to all those who were in need.
 - B. Because they had given up the sinful practices which had previously bound them.
 - C. Because their faith was proclaimed in all the world.
8. God continued to bless the people of Israel while they were in the desert in many ways.
- Which of the following statements best describes their reaction?
- A. They were genuinely thankful most of the time.
 - B. They were humbled by God's generosity.
 - C. They were dissatisfied with their circumstances and often complained about them.
9. How did the one leper who was healed show his thanks to Jesus?
- A. He fell on his face at Jesus' feet and gave Him thanks.
 - B. He sang an Old Testament Psalm of praise with a grateful heart.
 - C. He warmly embraced Jesus and followed Jesus wherever He went.
10. Why did Paul give thanks to God for the church in Thessalonica? (See 2 Thessalonians 1.)
- A. Because their faith was growing and their love was increasing.
 - B. Because they were greatly increasing in numbers.
 - C. Because their generosity was exceptional.

LESSON EIGHT – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Complete the following statement from 1 Thessalonians 5:18 : “Give thanks in _____ circumstances, for _____.”
2. According to Romans 8:28, why can we give God thanks even when our circumstances are difficult or unpleasant?
3. What reason does 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 give for being thankful even when our lives are filled with troubles or problems?
4. When believers give thanks to the Lord and demonstrate their thankfulness by cheerful giving, what effect will this have on others? See 2 Corinthians 9:11.
5. A. What reason for giving thanks is found in Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, and 31?
B. Why do you think this same verse is repeated so often in this Psalm?
6. In the Old Testament, God’s people sometimes brought thank “offerings” to the Lord and not simply “words” of thanks. Can you think of any way(s) in which a thank offering might be more significant than simply saying “Thank You”?
7. What does 2 Corinthians 9:7 say about the kind of people that God loves?
8. A. According to Daniel 2:23, what did Daniel thank God for?
B. What does Daniel 6:10 tell us about Daniel’s regular prayer life?
9. What spiritual blessings did Paul thank God for in the following passages?
A. Romans 7:24-25
B. 1 Corinthians 14:18
C. 2 Corinthians 9:15
10. What reason for giving thanks to God is found in Psalm 107:1, Psalm 118:1 and 29, and Jeremiah 33:11?
11. How did people give thanks to God at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem? See Nehemiah 12:27.
12. Why did Paul thank God for each of the following churches?
A. The church in Rome. Romans 1:8-10
B. The church in Philippi. Philippians 1:3-5
C. The church in Colossae. Colossians 1:3-4
D. The church in Thessalonica. 2 Thessalonians 1:3

13. What reason for thanksgiving does Paul give in Romans 6:17?
14. A. What did Paul teach about God's kindness to all people in Acts 14:17?
B. How do many people respond to God's kindness according to Romans 1:21?
15. What did Jesus give thanks for in the following passages?
A. Matthew 14:19
B. Mark 14:22-23
C. Luke 10:21



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to be “thankful”? Is “being thankful” the same as “feeling good” about your present circumstances? Is it possible to be genuinely “thankful” without giving thanks to *God*?
2. In Acts 27:35, Paul thanked God for his food in the presence of many people who were not believers. Do you think it is appropriate for us to give thanks to God for our food in public places where there are many non-believers? Please give the reason for your answer.
3. What would you say to someone who says to you: “My life is full of nothing but difficulties and problems, so why should I be thankful?”
4. Is it possible to give thanks to God through music or other activities *without* words? If so, are “wordless” expressions of gratitude as significant as expressions *with* words?
5. Will God take away some of our blessings if we do not clearly show in one way or another that we are thankful for them? If so, can you think of any examples of this in the Bible? Can you think of examples of this in your own life or in the lives of others?
6. When believers give sincere thanks to God even when they are experiencing trials and difficulties, what affect might this have on non-believers? If believers do *not* give God thanks in difficult times, what affect might *that* have on non-believers?
7. Does thankfulness usually depend on how many possessions we have? What makes a person thankful?
8. Would you be able to sing the song that includes the words: “Thanks for joy and thanks for sadness. Thanks for sorrow and for pain”? If you are not able to sing that song honestly, do you think you *should* be able to do so? How can we get to the point where we are genuinely and sincerely thankful in every situation?
9. In heaven people will continue to praise and thank God for ever. Do you think people in heaven will also offer prayers of confession and petition? Please give the reason for your answer.
10. Is it possible for someone to be a true believer without living a life of praise and thanksgiving?



SUPPLICATION AND INTERCESSION

Lesson Nine

PRAYER

Introduction

In Lesson Three we learned that God is merciful and gracious and that He delights in hearing our prayers and answering them. We were reminded that nothing in our lives is too big or too small to be beyond His interest or concern. We saw that He is so great and His resources are so unlimited that we can be sure that nothing is impossible with God. And we were taught to focus first of all on the Lord Himself, because when we “delight ourselves in the LORD,” He will give us “*the desires of our heart*” (Psalm 37:4). When we read and studied all those wonderful truths, we were encouraged and renewed as we saw over and over again that God truly does hear us and answer us when we pray.

In Lesson Three, we focused primarily on physical or material blessings. Such blessings are obviously very significant and very important. However, as we saw in Lesson Four, it is possible to focus so much on physical and material blessings that we forget or neglect that which is most important—namely, loving God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and loving others as ourselves.

In this Lesson, therefore, we will focus on three things:

- (1) Prayers for SPIRITUAL blessings
- (2) Prayers of INTERCESSION
- (3) Prayers of SUPPLICATION

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

- (1) Is it really possible to make a distinction between prayers for “material or physical blessings” and prayers for “spiritual blessings”? Are these not all interrelated?

Answer: All dimensions of our lives are interrelated in some way. However, there is a difference between *focusing* on our spiritual well-being and *focusing* on our physical or material needs and desires. In this Lesson we will focus in our prayer life on what we refer to as spiritual things.

- (2) What are prayers of INTERCESSION?

Answer: In this Lesson we use the term “prayers of intercession” to refer to prayers that we offer on behalf of others rather than ourselves.

- (3) What is the difference between prayers of SUPPLICATION and simple requests?

Answer: Both requests and supplications refer to prayers in which we ask God for specific blessings of some kind. However, it is possible to present a request to God without deep feeling and without an urgent sense of need. Supplications refer to requests that arise out of a sense of very deep feelings or very great need. For example, when someone we love is gravely ill or critically injured, we don’t simply *ask* God for help. We *plead* for help. We know that without a special blessing from the Lord, our loved one might die. Prayers which are presented with great earnestness or deep feeling are referred to in this Lesson as prayers of supplication.

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

God richly and graciously blesses us in many wonderful ways. However, He does not want us to become “warehouses” where we store up blessings or treasures to spend on ourselves. Rather, He blesses us so that we may glorify and praise Him for what we receive and also serve others in His name. When we pray, therefore, we must always seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness rather than focusing primarily on temporal or material needs. Though most believers would probably agree with that, many people still tend to emphasize temporal blessings rather than spiritual blessings in their prayers.

Already early in the Old Testament we read that God chose Abraham to be the person through whom He would bless the entire world. God said to him, *“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Genesis 12:2-3). That promise was fulfilled primarily through Abraham’s greatest descendant, Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again so that all who believe in Him might have eternal life.

Very often, however, Abraham’s descendants forgot that they were chosen by God to be a blessing to others. As a result, they frequently focused on themselves, emphasized their special position in the world as God’s children, and concentrated on their own personal comforts and successes. When Jesus came into the world two thousand years after Abraham, most of the Jews were still looking for an earthly kingdom, earthly power, earthly prestige and earthly glory.

Even Jesus’ disciples seemed at first to be primarily concerned about their own honor and position in this life. Jesus had to remind them repeatedly not to seek earthly glory and power for themselves—but to love and serve others in His name. (See Matthew 18:1-4; Matthew 20:20-21; Matthew 23:11; Mark 9:34-35; Luke 9:46-48; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:13-15; John 13:34-35; John 15:12-13, 17.)

The Apostle Peter also reminded believers that God had chosen them in Christ so that they might bring praise to God. He wrote:

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

The Apostle Paul emphasized the same theme when he wrote to the church in Ephesus:

“He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:5-6). See also Ephesians 1:11-12 and 1:14.

FOCUSING ON SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

It's true that there are many wonderful things in this world for us to enjoy—and God has made it possible for us to enjoy them. However, God does not want us to *focus* on these things as if they are the most important things in our lives. They definitely aren't! The pleasures may not be wrong, but the temptation exists to maximize that which is less important while neglecting that which is of greatest importance.

The Apostle John warns us not to give in to that temptation. He wrote, *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever”* (1 John 2:15-17).

The Apostle Paul was also keenly aware of the temptation to focus on secondary things and to neglect that which is primary, but he personally was given the grace to triumph joyfully over that temptation. He wrote:

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (Philippians 3:8-9).

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul described the kind of lives which believers should pursue—lives of purity, holiness, obedience, and compassion (Ephesians 4:17-32; Ephesians 5:1-20). And in his letter to the Galatians he taught that when we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, our lives will produce spiritual fruit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22-12). These are the kinds of spiritual blessings on which we should focus and these are the blessings for which we should most earnestly pray.

PRAYING FOR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your name may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.” Psalm 67:1-2

“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is

excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:9-11

Paul prayed for believers *“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.”*
Ephesians 1:17-18

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father . . . that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.” Ephesians 3:14-16

JESUS’ EXAMPLE OF PRAYING FOR OTHERS

When Jesus was on earth, He prayed frequently and earnestly to His Father in heaven. In His passionate High Priestly prayer, recorded in John 17:1-26, He prayed for His disciples and for all who would later come to believe in Him, focusing primarily on spiritual needs and blessings. On the night before His crucifixion, He prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). And on many other occasions He prayed for long periods of time, almost certainly including the spiritual needs of others in His prayers.

Jesus also continues to pray for us from His place of glory in heaven. In Hebrews 7:25 we read, *“[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”* 1 John 2:1 assures us that *“if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”* And in Romans 8:34 we read, *“Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”*

We are greatly encouraged by Jesus’ gracious prayers on our behalf. However, we should also be inspired to follow His example. If Jesus continues to pray for us in heaven, we certainly should pray for others while we are on earth! The Bible does not tell us whether or not believers are able to pray for people after they have gone to be with the Lord in heaven, but it definitely does encourage us to pray for each other now!

But praying for others can be very costly in terms of time and energy and commitment. In order for us to pray meaningfully for others, we must know what their needs and concerns are. And that may take a lot of time and effort. We must also persevere in prayer when answers to our prayers do not come immediately. And we must be patient when we hear more about continuing needs than we hear about victories and successes.

We must also be willing to be the answer to our own prayers by giving, helping, and providing what others need. If we pray for the material needs of others, we should be prepared to share with them what we already have. If we pray that they will be able to find a meaningful job, we should help them find work. If they have some other need—whether physical, material or spiritual, we should willingly help to meet that need in any way we can.

We must also be diligent in living the kind of Christian life we want others to live. If we pray that others will grow in grace, we should ourselves live an exemplary life of obedience. If we pray that they will find joy and peace in their lives, we should demonstrate joy and peace in our own lives. If we want them to know the love of Christ, we should show that love in how we live. As an old familiar saying reminds us, “YOU may be the only Bible that some people will ever read!”

Praying for others is an important and wonderful ministry of love and obedience. Even when we ourselves cannot provide the help that others need, we know Someone who can! And it is our privilege and responsibility to bring the needs of others to Him. He is able to do far more than we can ever ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20) and He loves His people with an everlasting love.

EXAMPLES OF PRAYING FOR OTHERS

Abraham prayed earnestly that God would spare the people of Sodom. Genesis 18:22-32

“Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘O God, please heal her—please.’”
Numbers 12:13

Moses prayed, “‘Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now.’” Numbers 14:19

David prayed that God would remove the plague from his people.
1 Chronicles 21:17

Jesus said, “*Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*” Luke 6:28

Stephen prayed: “*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.*”
Acts 7:60

To the believers in Rome Paul wrote: “*Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.*”
Romans 10:1

To the believers in Thessalonica Paul wrote: “We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

PRAYING SINCERELY AND WITH PASSION

Many people offer up prayers to the Lord without demonstrating either passion or compassion. They may be genuinely sincere, but neither their speech nor their actions demonstrate any kind of intensity or urgency. They “mention” the names of people in their prayers, but they do so without much feeling. They ask God to “bless” certain people or to meet certain needs, but they do so rather routinely.

God does hear those prayers and He often graciously grants what people ask for. But feeble, passionless prayers usually do not result in the kind of powerful, miraculous responses the Bible frequently describes. In most cases in the Bible when God responded to prayer with a demonstration of special power, the answer came in response to an earnest and passionate prayer.

It’s important to remember, however, that earnest, passionate prayer does not have to be loud or prolonged or expressed in eloquent speech. Sincerity and passion are matters of the heart, not a matter of volume or length or choice of words. According to James 5:16, it is “the prayer of a righteous man” that is powerful and effective. Quiet, humble prayers—even silent prayers which express the deepest desires of our hearts—can be sincere, intense, powerful, and effective.

There are many times, however, when the sincerity and passion of those who pray is reflected in what they do or in the words they use when they pray. For example, sometimes prayer is accompanied by fasting. Sometimes prayers are bathed in tears. Many times people “cry out” to the Lord as they seek relief from their distress. Others plead earnestly with the Lord, passionately begging Him for needed help. And some will continue to pray with perseverance and passion until they receive what they ask for.

In addition to praying with perseverance and passion, it is important to pray with faith, fully trusting that God will hear what we ask for and grant what we desire. Prayers of faith may be offered with the greatest confidence when we are seeking to bear spiritual fruit to the honor and glory of God, thus demonstrating the truth of Jesus’ words recorded in John 15:16: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit . . . so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

PRAYERS OF SUPPLICATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Although people in Old Testament times did not yet know the mercy and love and kindness of Jesus, they did know that their God was a powerful, merciful, loving, and compassionate God. They also believed that God heard their prayers and would graciously answer them. It is not surprising, then, that the Old Testament contains many passionate prayers of believing saints who offered their earnest supplications to the One who could save, rescue, protect, and forgive them.

“How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.” Psalm 13:1-3

“With my voice I cry out to the LORD . . . Attend to my cry for I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!” Psalm 142:1, 6-7

Moses said, *“I lay prostrate before the LORD for these forty days and forty nights because the LORD had said he would destroy you. I prayed to the LORD, ‘O LORD God, do not destroy your people.’”* Deuteronomy 9:25-26

“David . . . sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.” 2 Samuel 12:16

“Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD and said, ‘Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly.” Isaiah 38:2-3

Daniel wrote: *“Then I turned my face to the LORD God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” Daniel 9:3*

Nehemiah wrote: *“As soon as I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” Nehemiah 1:4-6*

JESUS AND PRAYERS OF SUPPLICATION

The New Testament also has many references to prayer, though it does not have as many specific prayers of “passionate intercession” as those listed above. Interestingly, some of the most passionate prayers recorded in the New Testament are the prayers of Jesus Himself. Although we do not know exactly what Jesus prayed for in every situation, we know that He sometimes prayed to His Father all night (Luke 6:12) or early in the morning (Mark 1:35). The Gospels also contain references to Jesus’ fervent prayers while He was in the garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion and also while He was on the cross.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, *“Jesus knelt down and prayed, saying, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. . . . And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” Luke 22:44*

While He was on the cross, *“Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” Matthew 27:46*

In some of His parables, Jesus also referred to the importance of sincere and even passionate prayer.

Jesus said, *“Will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?” Luke 18:7*

In His parable about the tax collector and the religious Pharisee, we read that *“the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’”* Luke 18:13

THE APOSTLE PAUL AND PRAYERS OF SUPPLICATION

At one point in his life, the apostle Paul was given some kind of “thorn in the flesh” which significantly affected his ministry. He wrote about this thorn in these words: *“A thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me”* (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). However, in spite of Paul’s earnest prayers and great faith, the thorn was not removed. Instead of getting what he had asked for, God gave him “sufficient grace” to deal with the thorn so that he could continue his God-appointed ministry.

Paul’s “unanswered passionate prayer” did not keep him either from working or from praying or from urging others to continue to pray. Read the following references to Paul’s emphasis on offering prayers of supplication to the Lord.

To the believers in Thessalonica Paul wrote: *“We pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith.”* 1 Thessalonians 3:10

To the Christians in Colossae he wrote: *“We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.”* Colossians 1:9-10

To believers in Rome, he wrote: *“I appeal to you, brothers . . . to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf.”* Romans 15:30

To the Philippian believers he wrote: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”* Philippians 4:6

To the Christians in Ephesus he wrote: *“praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication . . . making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.”* Ephesians 6:18-20

OTHER REFERENCES TO PRAYERS OF SUPPLICATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Believers continued to pray fervently as the church began to grow and missionaries were sent out to other lands. In Acts 4:31, we find that after the believers prayed, *“the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”* Sometime later believers were fasting and praying when the Lord answered their prayers to determine who would be the first “foreign missionaries” (Acts 13:2-3).

In Acts 12 we read that the Roman authorities killed the apostle James and then put Peter in prison, preparing to execute him within a few days. *“Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church”* (Acts 12:6-17). God answered those fervent prayers and miraculously set Peter free from prison and brought him to the home where the believers were praying.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

God often gives us wonderful physical and material blessings in answer to our prayers, and we should be very grateful for each one of them. However, the primary goal of our lives should not be to become rich, comfortable, or blessed with a superabundance of material things. Rather, our prayer life should focus first of all on bearing spiritual fruit that will bring glory to God and blessing to others.

As Jesus Himself taught us, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”* John 15:16

LESSON NINE

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Day 1 INTERCESSION FOR OTHERS

Genesis 18:23-33; Exodus 32:11-14; Exodus 33:12-17;
Deuteronomy 9:25-29; 1 Samuel 7:8-9; Psalm 106:23

Day 2 CRYING OUT TO GOD IN PRAYER

Exodus 2:23; Exodus 14:10; Exodus 15:25; Exodus 17:10;
Joshua 24:7; Judges 6:6; Judges 10:10; Psalm 5:2; Psalm 34:17;
Psalm 142:1-2, Psalm 142:6

Day 3 GOD'S ANSWERS TO THOSE WHO CRY OUT TO HIM

Judges 3:9; 1 Samuel 7:9; 1 Kings 17:19-23; 1 Chronicles 5:20;
2 Chronicles 13:14-18; Psalm 22:24; Psalm 34:6; Psalm 40:1-4;
Psalm 50:15; Psalm 65:5-8; Psalm 86:7; Psalm 107:6

Day 4 PRAYERS OF EARNESTNESS AND PASSION

2 Chronicles 14:11; Isaiah 38:2-3, 10-14; Psalm 6:1-3;
Psalm 69:1-3, 13-8; Psalm 102:1-11; Psalm 142:1-6

Day 5 PRAYERS OF PASSION AND NEED IN THE PSALMS

Psalm 55:1-8; Psalm 88:1-9; Psalm 143:1-9; Psalm 142:1-6

Day 6 PRAYERS FOR SPECIAL OR UNUSUAL BLESSINGS

Genesis 24:12-15; 2 Samuel 15:31-32; Nehemiah 4:8-9;
Psalm 13:3; Romans 10:1; Romans 15:31-32; 2 Thessalonians
3:22; 3 John 2

**Day 7 PRAYERS THAT GOD WILL BE HONORED AND
GLORIFIED**

Numbers 14:10-19; 2 Chronicles 14:11; Psalms 74:10-11, 18-23;
Psalm 79:9-13; Psalm 83:17-18; Psalm 86:11, 17; Psalm 106:47;
Psalm 142:7; Psalm 143:11; Isaiah 37:20.



LESSON NINE – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F Prayers of Intercession are usually prayers for spiritual blessings.
2. T F We may pray for material blessings for others but we should rarely ask God for material blessings for ourselves.
3. T F David prayed that the Lord would spare the life of his son and God graciously granted him what he had prayed for. (See 2 Samuel 12.)
4. T F Paul prayed for the believers in Philippi that their love would abound more and more. (See Philippians 1.)
5. T F Paul prayed for the Colossians that they would be healed from the frequent ills and sicknesses they were experiencing. (See Colossians 1:9-12.)
6. T F John prayed that the people to whom he was writing would be in good health. (See 3rd letter of John).
7. T F Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail. (See Luke 22.)
8. T F Paul often prayed for others but he never asked them to pray for him.
9. T F Paul told the Philippian Christians to make their requests known to God and the peace of God would guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (See Philippians 4).
10. T F Jesus continues to pray for us even after He returned to heaven.



MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1. When King Hezekiah was told that he was going to die (Isaiah 38):
 - A. He rejoiced in knowing that he was going to be with the Lord.
 - B. He wept bitterly and pleaded with God to spare him because of his faithful life.
 - C. He asked the prophet Isaiah to pray passionately for him.
2. When God told Abraham that he was going to destroy the city of Sodom (Genesis 18):
 - A. Abraham earnestly prayed that God would not destroy the city.
 - B. Abraham prayed that God would spare his nephew Lot who lived there.
 - C. Abraham prayed that God would forgive their sins and turn their hearts to Him.
3. In Numbers 14 Moses prayed earnestly for the people of Israel that:
 - A. God would forgive them because they had served Him faithfully.
 - B. God would punish them as they deserved because of their unfaithfulness.
 - C. God would forgive them because of the greatness of His love.
4. Paul wrote to the Ephesians (chapter 6) and asked them to pray that :
 - A. He would have the health and strength needed to continue his missionary journeys.
 - B. He would be able to proclaim the Gospel boldly.
 - C. He would be released from prison so that he could continue his missionary work.
5. James 5 teaches that:
 - A. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
 - B. The passionate prayer of someone who is fasting is powerful and effective.
 - C. The sincere prayer of a humble man is always effective.
6. When God said that He was going to destroy the people of Israel (Deuteronomy 9):
 - A. Moses lay prostrate before the Lord for forty days and forty nights in prayer.
 - B. Moses told the people to offer sacrifices to the Lord so that he would spare their lives.
 - C. Moses went off by himself to pray passionately for God's mercy.

7. When Nehemiah heard sad news about the people in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1):
- A. He immediately went to Jerusalem and urged the people to repent.
 - B. He wrote letters to the people in Jerusalem and urged them to repent and pray.
 - C. He stayed where he was and prayed and wept and fasted for many days.
8. In which Psalm do we find the following words: "Preserve my life, for I am godly"?
- A. Psalm 13
 - B. Psalm 71
 - C. Psalm 86
9. Paul prayed for the believers in Thessalonica that God would make them worthy of His calling and fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith so that:
- A. The name of the Lord Jesus might be glorified in them.
 - B. Their prayers would always be answered.
 - C. They would live faithful and fruitful lives among unbelievers.
10. In Jesus' parable about the tax collector and the Pharisee, the tax collector prayed:
- A. "God, help me to become a better person."
 - B. "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"
 - C. "God, I have often sinned, but I will love and serve You from now on."



LESSON NINE – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Indicate which of the following statements is most correct.
 - A. Since God is concerned about our spiritual well-being more than anything else, we should not pray very often about our material or physical well-being.
 - B. It is important to pray about our material and physical needs, but they should not be the primary focus of our prayer life.
 - C. Since God promised to take care of all our spiritual needs, we do not need to pray about them.
2. Fill in the missing words from John 15:16. Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to _____.
Then the Father will give you _____.”
3. In this Lesson, prayers of intercession refer to prayers which are offered on behalf of _____.
4. What is meant (in this Lesson) by prayers of “supplication”?
5.
 - A. What were the disciples of Jesus arguing about according to Mark 9:34?
 - B. What did Jesus teach the disciples about true greatness in Mark 9:35?
6.
 - A. Do you agree or disagree with the following sentence? “God blesses us in order that we may glorify and praise Him and serve others in His name.”
 - B. Please give the reason for your answer.
7. What promise did Jesus give in John 7:38?
8. Complete the following statement from 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may _____.”
9. What did John teach about the treasures and pleasures of the world in 1 John 2:17?
10. What blessings are asked for in each of the following passages?
 - A. Psalm 25:4
 - B. Psalm 143:10
 - C. Philippians 1:9
 - D. Colossians 4:2-4
 - E. Philemon 6

11. Jesus often prayed for others while He was on earth. What did He pray for in behalf of Peter? (Luke 22:32)
12. Write out three passages in the New Testament which teach us that Jesus is praying for us now in heaven.
- A.
- B.
- C.
13. Some of the intercessory prayers mentioned in the Bible are fairly simple and direct. What did people pray for in the following passages?
- A. 1 Samuel 13:6
- B. Numbers 12:13
- C. 2 Kings 6:16-17
- D. Acts 12:5
14. List six things Paul prayed for according to Colossians 1:9-12.
- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.
- E.
- F.
15. What did Paul pray for in behalf of the believers in Thessalonica? See 2 Thessalonians 1:11.
16. Read each of the following passages and indicate what the motive was of the person who prayed. (For example, they prayed "so that . . .")
- A. Psalm 67:1-2
- B. 1 Kings 18:37
- C. Psalm 106:47
- D. Isaiah 37:20
17. What does James 5:16 teach us about the prayer of a righteous person?

18. What are some of the ways in which people demonstrate their sincerity or passion or deep feeling when they pray?
19. A. Do you think the prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18:13 was a “passionate” prayer?
B. Please give the reason for your answer.
20. A. List (give the reference only) five prayers in the Bible which, in your judgment, demonstrate special feeling or sincerity or passion. [You may choose from the passages given in the Lesson or other passages of your own choosing.]
B. Indicate why you chose each of these particular passages.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. In the Old Testament (Genesis 12:1-3), God blessed Abraham so that he could be a blessing to the nations. Much of the time, however, Abraham’s descendants seemed to forget that. Why do you think that happened?
2. In the Lesson notes we read that prayers for other people can often be very “costly.” Do you think we should pray for others if we are not willing to help “answer” our own prayers by giving money, time, energy, or getting involved in other ways?
3. How would you respond to someone who teaches that “God always wants His children to be healthy, rich, comfortable, and lacking in nothing, so He will always give us everything we ask for”?
4. There is often a very strong temptation (even for those who are poor) to focus on material and physical things rather than on spiritual things. Why do you think that is so? How can Christians best resist that temptation?
5. Sincerity and earnestness in prayer can be expressed in different ways. Do you think it is possible to be passionate in your prayers without expressing it in a way that others can see it? How do YOU express sincerity and “passion” when you pray?



SEVEN FINAL QUESTIONS

Lesson Ten

PRAYER

Introduction

In this final Lesson we will consider seven important questions related to prayer and the believer. Since sincere and thoughtful believers may have different answers to some of these questions, the information presented here may help you reflect thoughtfully and prayerfully on what the Bible teaches about each subject.

QUESTION 1: **TO WHOM SHOULD WE PRAY?**

According to the Bible, we should pray to God and God alone. No one else has the power to help us, save us, or answer us. No one else knows our minds and hearts as He does, and no one else has the wisdom and power that He has. No one else can forgive our sins, give us power to overcome our weaknesses, heal our bodies, protect us from evil, or provide us with wisdom and guidance the way He can.

The Bible, therefore, never suggests in any way that we should pray to anyone other than the Triune God.

Though many people may be able to help us in various ways while they are here on earth, we never find any indication in the Bible that those who have died, no matter how sincere or faithful or holy they may have been, have either the power or the knowledge or the ability to help us.

There is only one true God who is able to answer our prayers.

Most religions have gods of one kind or another and many of them

emphasize the importance of ritual or formal prayers. However, most of them do not teach that there is a living, loving, omnipotent God who is able and eager to hear the prayers of His people and is willing to respond to their petitions and requests. Some religions teach that there are thousands or even millions of gods, each of whom has control over some aspect of life, but the Bible teaches that there is only one sovereign, personal, loving, and forgiving God who is in control of all things.

Only the one true God hears and answers the prayers of His people, provides for their needs, forgives their sins, and grants them an eternal life with Him in glory. And the Bible assures believers that they are able to pray to this sovereign God with confidence, courage, and boldness because Jesus, God's Son, has opened the way for them into His presence.

Scripture References

“Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”
Exodus 15:11

“And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.” Deuteronomy 8:19

“They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols and keep on praying to a god that cannot save.” Isaiah 45:20

When some people looked upon Paul and Barnabas as “gods” and started to worship them, they said:

“‘Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.’” Acts 14:15

QUESTION 2:

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY IN THE NAME OF JESUS?

Jesus is the divinely-appointed Mediator between God and man. Jesus has already demonstrated His great love for us by giving His life for us, so we are confident that He will graciously hear and answer our prayers as He promised He would.

Jesus has opened the way for us to come to God in prayer whenever we wish, wherever we are, and whatever we need.

When we pray to someone else or pray in any name other than the name of Jesus, we dishonor both the Father and the Son.

Scripture References

Jesus said, *“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”* Luke 10:22

Jesus said, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* John 14:6

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 2:5

Jesus said, *“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.”* John 14:13-14

The Authority of Jesus

After He died and rose again, Jesus was given a position of authority and power over all other powers or rulers in heaven and on earth. Since all authority has been given to the resurrected and glorified Jesus, we can come to the Father in His name in the confidence and assurance that He will hear us and answer us.

Scripture References

Jesus said, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* Matthew 28:18

God raised Christ from the dead and *“seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.”* Ephesians 1:20-22

“Therefore God has highly exalted him [Jesus] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”
Philippians 2:9-10

Jesus has died for us and opened the way for us to come to the Father as His children. Jesus is seated in glory at the right hand of the Father with power over everything and everyone. He loves us perfectly and with an everlasting love. No one has more power or authority or love for us than Jesus does!

Why, then, would we seek to come to the Father through anyone other than Jesus?

When we offer our prayers “In Jesus’ name” or pray “for Jesus’ sake,” we are bringing our prayers to the Father in the name of His Son, confident that we can come boldly to the Father because of Jesus’ grace and merits on our behalf.

QUESTION 3:

IS IT APPROPRIATE FOR US TO PRAY TO THE SON AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AS WELL AS TO THE FATHER?

According to the Bible, there is only one true God who has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we pray either to the Father or to the Son or to the Holy Spirit, therefore, we are praying to God.

Although the majority of the prayers recorded in Acts and the Epistles are addressed to God the Father (e.g., Ephesians 2:18; 3:14; 5:20) or simply to God (e.g., Romans 10:1-2; Philippians 1:3), some prayers are also addressed directly to Jesus.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed just before his death, “*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*” And then, as Stephen prayed for those who were putting him to death, he added, “*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*” (Acts 7:59-60).

The disciples were probably praying directly to Jesus in Acts 1:24 when they prayed for wisdom. Paul likely addressed Jesus in Acts 9:5 when he prayed, “*Who are you, Lord?*” Ananias also seemed to pray directly to Jesus in his prayer recorded in Acts 9:10-15. And in *1 Timothy 1:12*, Paul

wrote, “*I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service.*”

On the basis of these passages and Jesus’ own teaching in John 14:14 (“*If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.*”), it is clearly appropriate to pray directly to Jesus as well as to pray to the Father in Jesus’ name.

Since the Holy Spirit is truly God, it is also appropriate for us to address Him directly in our prayers. However, we are not commanded to do so and there are very few (if any) examples of prayers directed specifically to the Holy Spirit in the Bible. Though Paul does not teach us directly to pray to the Holy Spirit, he does emphasize that we should always pray “*at all times in the Spirit*” (Ephesians 6:18).

Besides, there are times when our minds and hearts seem to focus particularly on the Holy Spirit and in those times it would seem perfectly appropriate to address our prayers directly to Him.

It is interesting to note in this connection that many of the songs in our church hymnals are really prayers which are sung directly to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit. Examples of such hymns are the following: *Dwell in me, O Blessed Spirit; Spirit of the Living God; Eternal Spirit, God of Truth; Holy Spirit, Light Divine; Spirit of God, Dwell Thou Within My Heart; Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus; Jesus I Come; Jesus the Very Thought of Thee*; and many others.

So, even if we do not address the Son or the Holy Spirit directly in our spoken prayers, most of us do “sing our prayers” to both the Son and the Holy Spirit as well as to the Father.

QUESTION 4:

HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH GOD WHEN WE PRAY?

When we pray, we should always come to God with humility, confidence, reverence, and with deep respect. We should never address God casually or thoughtlessly. Though God is truly our Father and we may think of Him and address Him as our Father, we should never forget that He is also highly exalted, infinitely holy, and glorious in majesty. We should never think of Him or address Him simply as a casual acquaintance or “buddy” or refer to Him as the “man upstairs” or in some other disrespectful way.

Scripture References

“The Lord, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.” Psalm 47:2

“For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him? O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you?” Psalm 89:6-8

Approaching God as our Father

On two occasions in the New Testament, Paul refers to God as “*Abba*” (Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:16). This word was apparently used by children to address their earthly fathers as their “daddy,” someone whom they deeply loved and someone who deeply cared about them.

The use of the word “Abba” therefore suggests that we may have a warm, loving, personal relationship with God because of His eternal love for us in His Son Jesus. And because of this relationship we may approach God with a sense of intimacy, joy, expectation, and delight.

At the same time, however, we should remember that the word “Abba” does not intend to take anything away from the awesomeness of God or the reverence we owe Him. Though God is truly our loving Father, He is also the infinite, eternal, exalted Creator of heaven and earth, and we must never forget that.

Scripture References

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “‘Abba! Father.’” Romans 8:15

“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” Galatians 4:6

See also Mark 14:36 where Jesus addresses His heavenly Father as “Abba.”

Approaching God with Confidence

Even though God is highly exalted and is infinitely greater than we are, we may still approach Him with confidence and assurance. Since Jesus has opened the way for us into God’s presence, we do not have to wonder

whether or not He will hear us or whether He is willing to answer us. He will hear us and He will answer us—not because of any merit or worthiness on our part, but because we come to Him in the name of Jesus and on the basis of His merits.

Scripture References

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
Hebrews 4:16

“In [Christ] we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.” Ephesians 3:12

QUESTION 5:

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY FOR OUR ENEMIES?

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*” Matthew 5:44-45

The disciples may have wondered why Jesus told them to pray for their enemies, since in Old Testament times people often prayed that God would punish or destroy their enemies. (See, for example, Psalms 58, 59 and 69:19-28.) The enemies who are referred to in these Psalms, however, were not simply personal enemies who were making life difficult for others.

These were enemies of God who defied God and opposed Him and enticed His followers to depart from Him. As long as these enemies continued to fight against the Lord and His people in this way, believers prayed that they would be punished or destroyed.

The New Testament clearly teaches that those who persist in their opposition to God and who continue in their sin will surely be punished. The Apostle Paul also indicated that the Lord would deal appropriately with those who opposed him and his work for the Lord (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

However, when we encounter those who seek to do us harm, we should not return evil for evil, but we should seek their good and leave appropriate retribution up to the Lord. (See Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 2:19-23 and Proverbs 25:21-22.) Jesus sincerely taught His followers to love their

enemies, to forgive them, and to help them find life and salvation through faith in Himself.

*In the Sermon on the Mount, He taught His followers to pray,
“‘And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors’”
(Matthew 6:12).*

When Jesus explained what this meant, He said, “*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” (Matthew 6:14-15).

Jesus practiced what He preached when He prayed for His enemies while dying on the cross. He said, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). Later, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed for those who were stoning him to death, “*And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them’*” (Acts 7:60).

As believers we will be able to pray for our enemies only when we remember how much God has forgiven us and when we recall the tremendous price that Jesus paid so that we might be forgiven and accepted by our Father in heaven.

“When [Jesus] was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).

By following the example of Jesus and living according to His teaching, we will be able to live as children of our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:45).

Scripture References

*“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
Romans 12:20-21*

“You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” 1 Peter 1:18-19

“Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.” 1 Peter 3:9

So, how should we pray for our enemies? We should pray that those who oppose us or persecute us will repent of their sins, turn from their evil ways, and come to faith in Jesus Christ. We should pray that they will become fellow heirs with us through the mercy of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus, so that instead of being our enemies they will become our brothers and sisters in Christ. And if they refuse to repent and believe, we pray that we will have the patience, courage, and wisdom to leave appropriate retribution in the hands of God.

QUESTION 6:

SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST AND PRAY?

In biblical times, sincere prayers were often accompanied by fasting. People abstained from taking food and drink while they focused on praying to God. Both Elijah and Moses in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament fasted for forty days at one time! There are also many other examples of fasting in the Old Testament when people acknowledged and confessed their sins or when they presented the Lord with special needs or requests.

Old Testament References

- Moses fasted because the people had sinned grievously against the Lord. *He said, “I lay prostrate before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed.”* Deuteronomy 9:9,18
- David fasted as he prayed earnestly to the Lord for the health of his child. *“And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and he became sick. David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.”* 2 Samuel 12:15-16
- Ezra *“proclaimed a fast there . . . that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods.”* Ezra 8:21

Nehemiah *“sat down and wept and mourned for days, and . . . continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”* Nehemiah 1:4

Daniel *“turned [his] face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.”* Daniel 9:3

On other occasions people fasted when they experienced great sorrow or special need (I Samuel 1:3-7) or when they prayed for healing (2 Samuel 12:15-18), for wisdom, for guidance or for some other special blessing (Daniel 6:18; 10:2-3).

New Testament References

Specific references to fasting in the New Testament are less common than in the Old Testament. However, it is likely that the people fasted rather frequently—just as faithful and sincere believers did in Old Testament times.

“Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.” Matthew 4:1-2

Jesus said, “When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
Matthew 6:16-18

“[Anna] did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.” Luke 2:37

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” Acts 13:2-3

“And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Acts 14:23

There is no specific command or requirement in the New Testament that God’s people should fast and pray. However, in Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus seemed to assume that His followers would fast (even as many people did

in Old Testament times). He also indicated that His disciples would fast after He was gone (Luke 5:35).

In the Book of Acts we read about two or three special occasions when people fasted and prayed, indicating that at that time fasting was still practiced by sincere believers—especially at important times in their lives (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23).

Proper Motives for Fasting

Though fasting is usually presented in a very favorable light in the Bible, fasting can become a formal or routine ritual without true repentance and without genuine concern for learning and doing the will of God. When that happens, people fast when they think it is their *duty* to fast (Luke 18:12) or when they want to impress others by fasting (Matthew 6:16-18). *On some occasions people fasted because they felt that fasting would somehow “obligate” God to give them a special blessing (Isaiah 58:2). However God made it very clear to them that fasting with wrong motives was of no value whatsoever and was very highly displeasing to Him.*

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Since much has been accomplished through fasting and prayer both in biblical times and in church history, we should not quickly or lightly declare that fasting for spiritual purposes is no longer desirable for us today. Even if we choose not to fast ourselves, it is still profitable to learn what the Bible teaches about fasting and to learn about the blessings that others have experienced through fasting. At the same time, we should not quickly condemn those who do not fast as if they are violating a clear and direct command of the Lord.

If we fast with wrong motives, or if fasting interferes in some way with our praying or with our Christian living and service, or if it causes us to focus more on fasting itself than on sincere and thoughtful praying, then fasting becomes more of a hindrance than a blessing.

However, if fasting helps us become more aware of the seriousness of our sins, if it helps us pray more earnestly and sincerely, if it helps us pray with fewer distractions and with greater spiritual power, or if it helps us to focus our attention on the Lord and spiritual things rather than on ourselves and material things, then fasting can be a great blessing in our prayer life.

QUESTION 7:

SHOULD CHRISTIANS PRAY IN “TONGUES”?

Speaking and praying in tongues or unknown languages is very common among some Christians. Other Christians, equally devout and sincere, do not speak in tongues themselves and believe that the era of “speaking in tongues” was intended only for the early church.

The first occasion of speaking in tongues in the New Testament took place on Pentecost, just a few weeks after Jesus returned to His Father in heaven (Acts 2:1-4). The people who were present on that occasion were amazed to find that the Holy Spirit gave the disciples the ability to speak in languages they had never studied or learned. Peter, speaking for all the others, indicated that their ability to speak in these languages was a fulfillment of a prophecy made by Joel hundreds of years before. (See Acts 2:17-21).

Since some believers spoke or prayed in tongues while others did not, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about the proper use of this special gift and urged people not to misuse it or abuse it (1 Corinthians chapters 12-14).

Paul not only was able to speak and pray in tongues himself, but he also thanked God for the fact that he spoke in tongues more than others did (1 Corinthians 14:18). However, he also indicated that he would rather speak five words in a language that others understood than to speak ten thousand words which they did not understand (1 Corinthians 14:19).

Paul also wrote that having the gift of being able to speak in “tongues” was worth nothing if a person did not demonstrate true love for God and for others (1 Corinthians 13:1). Finally, he taught that the “gift” of tongues was given by the Holy Spirit only to some believers and not to all of them (1 Corinthians 12:10-11 and 12:30).

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth that they should not forbid speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:39). However, he also warned against the misuse or inappropriate use of this gift since speaking in tongues, even if “genuine,” can be done with wrong motives or at inappropriate times or in ways that are not edifying. He also emphasized the importance of praying in a way that others can understand what is being said (either because they understand the language or because someone is able to translate

the message for them). This is especially important when a person prays or speaks in tongues in public so that others are not wondering what is being said or prayed. (See Paul's careful teaching on these matters in 1 Corinthians 14.)

Summary and Conclusion

Those who do not speak or pray in tongues and do not desire to do so should be very careful not to condemn any genuine work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others. And those who claim to have the gift of praying in "tongues" should humbly seek to use their gift in a way that truly glorifies God and edifies both themselves and others.

A FINAL WORD ON THE BLESSING OF PRAYER

After we have been believers for some time, we may tend to forget what a tremendous privilege it is for us to be able to pray to a loving, gracious, and all-powerful God who promises to hear and answer us.

Moses reminded the people of Israel of that truth long ago when he said to them, "*For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?*" Deuteronomy 4:7

David wrote: "*Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found.*" Psalm 32:6

And Paul reminded us to "*Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit . . . but test everything; hold fast what is good. . . . May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely . . . He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. Brothers, pray for us.*" 1 Thessalonians 5:17-26

HOW, THEN, SHOULD WE PRAY?

Let us pray **humbly**, recognizing that God owes us nothing but grants us all the blessings we enjoy only because of His mercy and His grace.

Let us pray **confidently**, believing that God is willing to forgive every sin we confess and will meet every need we express and will strengthen and encourage us in every situation we experience.

*Let us pray **persistently** without quickly concluding that God has chosen not to answer our prayers.*

Let us pray **continually**, remembering that God's ears are open every moment of every day to every prayer we offer.

*Let us pray **wisely**, seeking not first of all a life of comfort and ease for ourselves but praying that our lives will significantly promote the kingdom of God.*

Let us pray **unselfishly**, being concerned about the physical and spiritual needs of others as well as our own.

*Let us pray **thoughtfully** asking the Lord to teach us how to pray, even as His disciples did.*

Let us pray **reverently**, remembering that though God is our loving heavenly Father, He is also the Lord of the universe and the King of kings.

*Let us pray **joyfully**, giving thanks and praise to the One who has saved us and is preparing a home for us in glory.*

And let us continue to pray **faithfully** that people around the world may soon come to know Jesus as Savior and as Lord.

To God be all the glory for granting us the Blessing of Prayer! May all His children join together in giving thanks and praise to the triune God both now and forever.

LESSON TEN

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Day 1 PRAYING TO THE FATHER WITH CONFIDENCE

John 14:13-14; Ephesians 1:16-22; 2:17-18; 3:11-12;
Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 9:24; Hebrews 10:10, 19-22

Day 2 PRAYING TO THOSE WHO CANNOT ANSWER

Leviticus 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:9-13; 2 Kings 21:6;
2 Kings 23:24-25; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14; Isaiah 8:19

Day 3 FORGIVING AS YOU HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN

Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 6:32-26; Ephesians 4:31-5:2

Day 4 FASTING WITH PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

1 Kings 21:25-28; Ezra 10:1, 6; Nehemiah 1:4-7;
Nehemiah 9:1-3; Daniel 9:3-19

Day 5 FASTING THAT IS PLEASING TO GOD

Isaiah 58:3-14; Zechariah 7:1-10

Day 6 FASTING AND PRAYING

2 Chronicles 20:3-17; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:3, 15-16,
9:18-22; Jonah 3:6-10

Day 7 PRAYING IN UNKNOWN TONGUES

1 Corinthians 14:1-40



LESSON TEN – TEST QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle T or F.

1. T F We should pray only to God and not to saints or angels or any other persons
2. T F In Romans 8 we read that all things work together for good for those who love God.
3. T F When Jesus taught that we should pray for our enemies and for those who persecute us, He was deliberately exaggerating in order to make an important point.
4. T F David once wrote that his body had no fat because of his fasting.
5. T F Jesus approved of fasting and also fasted Himself.
6. T F There are many gods in this world that are basically like the God of the Bible.
7. T F The Old Testament required the people of Israel to fast six specific times each year.
8. T F Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
9. T F People who fast regularly earn special blessings from God.
10. T F The Apostle Paul approved of speaking in “tongues,” but he himself rarely did so.



MULTIPLE CHOICE

Choose which of the three statements is correct. Circle A or B or C.

1. Since God is highly exalted above us:
 - A. We should always kneel when we pray to Him.
 - B. We should always pray to Him with humility and respect.
 - C. We should never pray to Him about ordinary things.
2. The word “Abba” basically means:
 - A. Lord or King
 - B. Father or Daddy
 - C. Savior or Redeemer
3. Why did Moses fast according to Deuteronomy 9:9 and 9:18?
 - A. Moses was setting aside a special time to bring praise and honor to God.
 - B. Moses was expressing the gratitude of the people of Israel for God’s blessings.
 - C. The people of Israel had committed some great sins against God.
4. Read Nehemiah 1 and Daniel 9. Nehemiah and Daniel fasted while confessing:
 - A. Their own sins.
 - B. The sins of the people of Israel.
 - C. Both their own sins and the sins of the people.
5. Which of the following persons fasted for 40 days in succession?
 - A. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah
 - B. Moses, Paul, and Isaiah
 - C. Jesus, Peter and Elijah
6. In which book of the Bible do we find these words: *“Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning”*?
 - A. Psalms
 - B. Joel
 - C. Isaiah
7. On which of the following occasions did people speak in tongues?
 - A. When Peter preached in the home of the Gentile Cornelius.
 - B. When Jesus arose from the grave.
 - C. When Jesus ascended to heaven.

8. Fill in the blank in this sentence from Hebrews 4: *"Let us then with _____ draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*
- A. Humility
 - B. Reverence
 - C. Confidence
9. Which of the following statements is correct?
- A. The Old Testament does not contain any prayers offered directly to the Holy Spirit, but the New Testament records several of them.
 - B. The New Testament records no or very few direct prayers to the Holy Spirit.
 - C. Both the Old and New Testaments encourage believers to pray to the Holy Spirit.
10. Where do we read: *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"*
- A. Revelation 21
 - B. Matthew 28
 - C. Romans 8

LESSON TEN – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- 1. What does Deuteronomy 8:19-20 teach about worshipping other gods than the God of the Bible?
- 2. Write out two passages that teach that we may come to the Father in prayer with confidence that He will hear and answer us.
 - A.
 - B.
- 3. Which of the following statements is most correct?
 - A. Since God is perfectly holy and we are not, we should not come into His presence through prayer more often than is absolutely necessary.
 - B. Though God is highly exalted, He wants us to talk to Him in prayer just as we would talk to any friend or neighbor we have on earth.

- C. Though we may approach God in prayer with confidence and trust, we should always come before Him with deep reverence and genuine humility.
4. The apostle Paul twice refers to God in his writings as *Abba*.
- A. List the two passages where this name or title is found. (Do not write them out).
- (1)
- (2)
- B. What is the significance of using this name or title for God in our prayers?
5. Jesus taught us to pray, "And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." What "commentary" did He give on that petition in Matthew 6:14-15?
6. Complete the following sentences from Romans 12:20-21.
- "If your enemy is hungry, _____."
- "If he is thirsty, _____."
- "Do not be overcome by evil, but _____."
7. List the names of three persons in the Bible who fasted for forty days.
- A.
- B.
- C.
8. A. Why did Moses fast according to Deuteronomy 9:9 and 18?
- B. Why did David fast in 2 Samuel 12:16?
- C. Why did Ezra and the people fast in Ezra 8:21-22?
9. Read carefully Nehemiah 1:5-7 and Daniel 9:3-7.
- A. Whose sins did Nehemiah and Daniel confess?
- B. Do you think Nehemiah and Daniel were *personally* guilty of all the sins they confessed? Please give the reason for your answer.
10. When Mordecai told Queen Esther to go to the king and plead with him to save her people (the Jews), what did Esther do? See Esther 4:15-16.

11. What does Luke 2:37 tell us about aged Anna?
12. A. What were the people doing when the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Paul and Barnabas for a special ministry? See Acts 13:2-3.
B. What did they do after the Holy Spirit spoke to them about this?
C. How did Paul and Barnabas commit the new elders to the Lord? See Acts 14:23.
13. A. On which day of the year were the Israelites commanded to fast in Old Testament times? See Leviticus 16:29.
B. Are there any specific commands or requirements in the New Testament when God's people were required to fast? If so, please give the reference.
14. On what three recorded occasions in the New Testament did the Holy Spirit enable people to speak in "tongues"?
A.

B.

C.
15. Complete the following sentences from 1 Corinthians 14:18-19.
"I thank God _____
_____. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five
words with my mind to instruct others than _____
_____."



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. A. Why should believers pray only to God and not to saints or anyone else?
B. How would you respond to someone who insists that his or her prayers to saints (or others) have definitely been answered?
2. How would you respond to someone who says: "Since there is only one God, people of all religions basically pray to the same God even if they refer to Him by different names?"
3. A. In what way is Prayer a "blessing"?
B. In what way is prayer an "obligation"?
C. If we pray only because we feel that we "have to," will God still hear and answer our prayer?
4. What are some "good reasons" for fasting along with praying?
Are there any good reasons why we should *not* fast?
5. To pray for our enemies and ask God to forgive them can be very difficult. What can we do to help us sincerely pray for them? What are the consequences for *us* and for *them* if we do not pray for them?
6. What would you say to someone who says: "We should always pray to God the Father in the name of Jesus, but we should not pray directly to Jesus Himself"?
7. Many people pray the "Lord's Prayer" very frequently. What are the "positives" of doing that? Are there also some possible "negatives" of doing that?
8. What are some of the possible "positives" and "negatives" of praying in "tongues"? Should we all seek to pray in tongues? Are prayers in tongues more "powerful" or more "meaningful" than "ordinary" prayers?
9. When you pray "in Jesus' name" or "for Jesus' sake," what do you mean? Is it necessary or desirable to add these words ("in Jesus' name" or "for Jesus' sake") to every prayer?
10. What are some of the specific promises in the Bible that encourage you to keep on praying even when your prayers may seem to be "unanswered"?