

Scripture Points: Prayer
Dr. Art Lindsley

Matthew 6:1-8

“(1) Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your father in heaven . . . (5) And when you pray you are not to be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. (6) But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will repay you. (7) And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. (8) Therefore, do not be like them; for your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”

→ Even before teaching His disciples how to pray (the Lord’s Prayer) Jesus warns them about the danger of religious activities such as prayer leading to pride and religious showmanship.

→ It is ironic that people can use prayer, which ought to encourage the greatest humility before God, as the means to establish a reputation for piety among men.

→ When we pray, we are to focus on the “Audience of One” – our Father – by praying in secret.

→ We are not to think that the length of our prayers, or their eloquence, or the number of repeated phrases, make us more spiritual or acceptable before God.

→ We don't need to explain our whole situation to our Father (as if He didn't know it), but simply ask Him for what we need.

Matthew 6:9-13

“(9) Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

(10) Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (11) Give us this day our daily bread. (12) And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

(13) And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

→ The Lord's Prayer in these verses is a tremendous model not only for prayer but in terms of priorities for spiritual life.

→ Our ultimate priority is to orient our hearts and lives towards “Our Father” – calling on Him.

→ God is our Father in the sense that He provides for and protects us. He loves us and will respond to our requests.

→ Even though He is our Father, and thus approachable, He is also holy. His name is to be Hallowed – given honor and upheld with the greatest reverence.

→ Someone who loves God desires for his kingdom to come, not only in the future (the Second Coming), but in the present. God's kingdom is His rule being established in our own lives and throughout the world.

→ God's rule and reign are perfectly established in Heaven . It is our cry that the same rule and reign be established on earth.

→ We are to acknowledge our dependence on God for our daily provision (such as bread). Even though we work for a living, it is God who gives us life, health, gifts, and opportunities to work. Any or all of these could be taken away at any time.

→ At the core of our faith in the Gospel is forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness and repentance for sin are needed continually, not just at the beginning of our Christian lives.

→ The more we know our need for forgiveness, the more we will be willing to forgive others.

→ If we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven (Matt 6:15).

→ We all live on the edge of falling to temptations whether physical or spiritual, and need God's help in the spiritual warfare involved.

→ The last phrase ("Thine is the kingdom . . .") is not in the earliest, best manuscripts of the New Testament.

Luke 11:5-8

“(5) And He said to them, ‘Suppose one of you shall have a friend and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves; (6) for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him;’ (7) and from inside he shall answer and say, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence [or shamelessness] he will get up and give him as much as he needs.”

→ Hospitality is an essential obligation in the Middle East. Even if friends arrive at midnight, you are to have food for them.

→ Because of hospitality's importance, it would be unheard of or shameful for a friend to use trivial excuses, such as the door is shut or my children are in bed. If one were to refuse to give bread, he would be shamed by the community.

→ The point of the parable is either persistence in prayer or even more likely the idea that the friend would be ashamed or shamed by the community if he were to refuse the bread. In this latter case, the argument goes that if even a neighbor (not necessarily a friend) would give in to such an important request, how much more will God honor our requests.

Luke 11:9-13

“(9) And I say to you, ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. (10) For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. (11) Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? (12) Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? (13) If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

→ In this passage that follows the parable of the friend at midnight, we are encouraged to ask our Heavenly Father for good things (particularly the Holy Spirit).

→ If we ask, we will receive. If we seek, we will find. If we knock, the door will be opened. These are pretty unequivocal promises. However, I suppose we need to ask the questions, “receive what?” “find what?” or “opened to what?” In some cases, we may receive or find something slightly (or greatly) different from what we ask for.

→ However, since God is good, we can expect Him to give us better things than we ask for.

→ There is a fish (Barbut) that looks like a fish but also crawls on the ground like a snake.

→ A scorpion rolled up in a protective mode looks like an egg.

→ The Father gives better things than the son asks for.

→ The promise to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask seems to be totally unequivocal and without qualification – So, ask!

Luke 18:1-8

“(1) Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, (2) saying, ‘There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. (3) And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him saying, “Give me legal protection from my opponent.”’ (4) And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward, he said to himself, “Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, (5) yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.”’ (6) “And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; (7) now shall not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? (8) I tell you that He will bring

justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the Earth?”

→ Note that this parable of the unjust judge is about persistence in prayer, a particular kind of persistence in the face of injustice. It’s about maintaining faith and continuing in prayer in even the most unjust conditions.

→ The main point is that if even an unjust judge can be motivated to do justice because of the persistent pleas of a widow, how much more will God respond to pleas for justice by His people.

→ Note that the judge did not fear God or man but yielded to the widow lest she wear him out. She must have been very assertive.

→ One of the most difficult tests of faith is to continue to cry out to God even when everything around you remains dark and foreboding.

→ In fact, the question is asked about whether when Christ returns He will find this kind of faith on the earth.

Romans 8:26-27

“(26) And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; (27) and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

→ When we are struggling to pray, the Spirit is available to help us.

→ The greatest difficulty in intercessory prayer is to know what to pray for.

We need to pray for what to pray for and let the Spirit guide us.

→ True prayer is letting the Spirit intercede through us (praying in the Spirit).

→ When we “pray in the Spirit,” we are interceding according to the will of God. We are praying for that which God will do. Our will and God’s will are the same. In this case, it is not necessary to pray, “not my will but Thine be done.” The Spirit and the Father are united in purpose.

Ephesians 6:18

“With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance, and petition for all the saints.”

→ This verse follows the passage on the armor of God. Each piece of armor is to be put on in prayer.

→ All prayer may mean all kinds of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication (ACTS).

→ Pray at all times probably means not that we can’t do anything other than pray, but that we keep our spirit oriented towards God (practicing His presence) so that many “arrow” prayers ascend to the Father throughout our day and not just in focused times of prayer.

→ Note again the call to perseverance.

→ We are not just to pray for our immediate relationships, but also for those issues and struggles of people throughout the world – all kinds of believers.

Romans 8:34

“Christ is He who died, yes rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”

Hebrews 7:25

“Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

I John 2:1

“And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Luke 22:31-32

“(31) Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat, (32) but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

- Note the repeated emphasis that Christ prays for us.
- Jesus is an Advocate to the Father, pleading our case to Him, so we can be assured that God the Father will forgive our sins when we ask.
- Jesus not only saves but prays for those who are His, guaranteeing their salvation forever.

→ Simon is attacked by Satan, but Christ prays for him, and His prayer will be answered because Jesus says “when” you turn, not “if” you turn.

→ If Christ prays for us, then that is a comfort and should be a source of strength in trials.

Luke 22:40

“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”

→ Jesus tells this to His disciples as He goes to pray in the Garden.

→ They were not so good at following His instructions. They kept falling asleep (vs 46).

→ Prayer is clearly seen by Jesus as a means of overcoming temptation.

Matthew 21:21-22

“(21) And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, “Be taken up and cast into the sea,” it shall happen. (22) And everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.’”

→ Jesus consistently exhorted people to have faith and expect God to answer prayers (according to his will).

→ Doubt (unbelief) hinders our prayers.

Matthew 17:20

“And he said to them, ‘Because of the littleness of your faith, for truly, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.” (See also Mark 11:23; Luke 17:6; James 1:6.)

Luke 22:42

(Jesus) “Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done.”

James 4:3

“You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

→ Selfish motivation is a major obstacle to answered prayer.

I John 5:14

“ . . . if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

→ This is a major key to answered prayer.

II Corinthians 12:8-9 (Paul’s thorn in the flesh)

. . . “(8) I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. (9) and He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’”

→ Note that we are to ask God in faith for what we desire, but we are not given a blank check as we see in the latter verses.

→ There was a Rabbinic teaching about mountain movers – people who could solve all kinds of problems.

→ Faith is powerful, even a little bit of it.

→ Jesus in the Garden gave His requests but qualified it with, “not my will but Thine be done.”

→ One reason we may not receive is that what we ask for may be wrongly motivated and thus wrong for us to receive.

→ God may say “No” because He has a purpose for the trial we are going through.