

HOW TO PRAY EFFECTIVELY

Matthew 6:5-15

Recently we have been considering the theme "Learning To Pray." In this series we have studied the following themes: "What Is Prayer?", "Why Should We Pray?" and "Christ's Prayer Example." Now we shall center our thoughts on the subject, "How To Pray Effectively." Of our need of prayer there is no question. Prayer is the greatest and most neglected force in Christian service. Unfortunately many do not really know how to pray effectively. How would God have us to pray? How shall we approach the King of Glory?

I. Reverently.

Before we pray we should have such a consciousness of God's presence that we can approach His throne of grace with reverence. God is infinitely above us.

II. Sincerely.

The Greek for the word "sincere" means "clear to the light," as when one holds up a jar of honey and the light streams through unobstructed. When subjected to the test it is just what it seems to be, genuine through and through. Sincerity means transparency. He who is sincere is known on the outside for what he is on the inside. A sincere Christian is just what he appears to be. He appears to be just what he is.

"Sincere" comes from two latin words, "Sine," meaning "without," and "cera," the word for "wax" -- "without wax." In the early days they made many of their vessels of wood, hollowed out, such as a basin. Sometimes when the vessel was finished, it was found that the wood had not been seasoned properly and it cracked, and the dealer, not wishing to throw it away, would seal the crack with wax. The purchaser did not use it long before discovering the defect. So, if a man was an honest tradesman, and wanted you to know that his goods were sound, he would say, "without wax."

"Sincere" means that there is nothing made up in your life, or that you are just what people see you to be.

We must pray without hypocrisy. "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (Matthew 6:5). In prayer we must not be anxious to be seen or heard of men. At the dedication of Bunker Hill Monument, one of New England's preacher-orators prayed. A Boston newspaper the next day said, "It was one of the finest prayers ever delivered to a Boston audience."

Hypocrisy is play acting. Prayer is not acting a part before God. God sees through our pretense. Once Christ refused to grant a sign on demand, "And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after

a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark 8:11-12). Once Christ refused to give His credentials to those who opposed Him but Christ never refused a sincere request for physical or spiritual help. Prayers from hypocritical hearts and lives of sham are as dust clouds that bring no rain or empty wells from which no water is drawn. Our prayers will be answered when we offer them in sincerity. "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth" (Psalm 145:18).

There are many insincere petitions. For instance, there may be someone praying, "Lord, fill me with Thy Spirit." Yet that person knows full well that in order to be filled with the Spirit he must stop grieving Him with the character-faults that have dominion over him in his home and social life, that he must give himself to larger service and greater usefulness to Christ. We must be sure that we really desire the things for which we pray.

III. Forgivingly.

Our love for God is evidenced by our love for others. That is why we are told to put away all envies and jealousies when we approach the mercy seat. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:25-26). It is impossible to be successful or effective in prayer if one has an unforgiving spirit.

IV. Privately.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:6). That means to shut out everything and everybody except God and you. You cannot be insincere when you are alone with God. We need to go into the private place with God before we walk into the public place for Him. We need to hide ourselves with God before we show ourselves for God. Dr. A. C. Dixon once said, "Prayer may be public or private, but it must always be secret in the sense that it is a personal transaction between the soul and God."

V. Boldly.

Of the many passages which encourage us to come with courage, candor and confidence to our heavenly Father and tell Him all that is in our hearts Hebrews 4:16 is one of the best: "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." To come boldly unto the throne of grace does not mean to come irreverently. Rather, it means to come without fear, realizing that in Christ we have the right to come and that the Father will hear us for the sake of His Son. We should come with the same confidence which a child reveals in approaching his earthly father.

Coming boldly also means to come with large petitions.

"Thou art come to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring."

Many Christians lack that kind of boldness. They reason within themselves: "God is infinitely great, and I am an insignificant part of His creation," which is true and should be realized, but the conclusion reached from this premise, "Therefore He will not pay much attention to my prayers," is not true. Instead of coming boldly to the throne of grace, such people approach it with misgiving, doubt and fear.

"What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer."

VI. Specifically.

Our Lord has taught us to be specific in our praying. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:7-11). If we want sickness taken away, we should pray definitely for that. We should not generalize in vague petitions but pray for specific objects.

VII. Obediently.

Christ said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). To have our prayers answered, we must do the bidding of our Lord in Whom we abide. In I John 1:22 we read: "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." To keep His commandments means to do the things with which He is pleased.

VIII. Believingly.

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the Father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:23-24). "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22). "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye

desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:6). When we ask in faith our prayers will be answered.

IX. Persistently.

If the answers to our prayers are delayed, that need not discourage us. Christ taught this very plainly when He spoke the parable in which He said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). God does not always grant our requests when we first make them. It may be necessary for us to ask for some things repeatedly and over an extended period before we receive them. For more than sixty years George Mueller prayed specifically for the salvation of two men. One of these men was saved shortly before Mueller died and the other one was saved a year after his death.

X. Fervently.

James has reminded us that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). No cold prayer will ever avail much with God. A fervent prayer is one which has an intensity of spirit such as Jacob when he told God, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Genesis 32:26). The fervent or boiling prayer availeth much.

XI. Submissively.

In His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane Christ gave us a splendid example of submissiveness in prayer. There He prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Christ's main thought was God's will.

God's will must be paramount in our praying. If our prayers are to be answered, they must be in accordance with and submissive to God's will. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (I John 5:14). We must ask our loving Father to grant our wishes and requests if they are best for us and in accordance with His plans for us. Submissive praying is endeavoring to make our wills conform to His blessed and perfect will.

"Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter,
I am the clay.
Mould me and make me
After Thy will,
While I am waiting,
Yielded and still.

"Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Search me and try me,
Master, Today!
Whiter than snow, Lord,
Wash me just now,
As in Thy presence
Humbly I bow.

"Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Wounded and weary,
Help me, I pray!
Power--all power--
Surely is Thine!
Touch me and heal me,
Saviour divine!

"Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Hold o'er my being
Absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit
Till all shall see
Christ only, always,
Living in me!"

XII. Dependently.

We can pray aright only when we have faith in His promises and depend entirely upon the merits and mediation of Christ as our only ground of any claim for blessing. Our Lord said, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). The name of Christ is the sole basis of our claim upon God; indeed, it is more, it is the only means of access to God. We are to pray in the name of Christ, because in our own names we do not have any merit or any claims upon God.

We need a "check" wherewith to "draw" upon the bank of heaven. Christ gives us a blank check, asks us to fill it in and to present it in His name at the bank of heaven when we pray, and He assures us that our requests will be honored. Since we do not have any deposits there, we will not get anything if we go in our own names. But, since Christ has unlimited credit in heaven, and He has granted us the privilege of going with His name on our checks, our prayers will be answered to any extent, provided they are in His name. To pray in His name is to ask on the ground of His credit and not ours. The purpose of both the asking and the giving is that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

XIII. Expectantly.

Prayer requires confidence. It is unwavering confidence that makes one powerful in prayer. If there is no confidence or expectancy, there cannot be any power.

Christ has taught us to pray expectantly. The faith of expectancy is not believing that God can do what we ask, that He will do what we request, provided it is for His glory, for the benefit of others or for our ultimate welfare. John speaks of this when he says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (I John 5:14-15). Our faith is the important factor in the gifts which we shall receive from God in answer to our prayers.