

PRAYER IN LUKE

When Jesus Christ lived on earth He did really pray. He taught much about prayer but that teaching will remain little more than a dead letter until it really begins to register on our minds that he taught us how to pray not in word only but also in act. Christ showed us how to pray by praying. Luke 11:1 The request, "Lord, teach us to pray" came to the hearts of the disciples, when they actually watched the Son of God at prayer. Looking at Jesus Christ praying they suddenly realized what prayer was. If that was prayer they had not yet started to pray.

1. Christ prayed at the great events of His life.

- (1) At His baptism - chapter 3, verse 21
- (2) When He chose the twelve - chapter 6, verse 12
- (3) At the confession of His Messiahship - / chapter 9, verse 18
- (4) At the transfiguration - chapter 9, verse 29
- (5) In Gethsemane - chapter 22, verses 39 through 46
- (6) On the cross - chapter 23, verse 46

2. He prayed during the course of His ministry.

- (1) Before the great conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities - chapter 5, verse 16
- (2) Before giving the Lord's prayer - chapter 11, verse 1

3. He prayed for others.

- (1) For those who nailed Him to the cross, chapter 23, verse 34
- (2) For Peter - chapter 22, verse 32

Luke is our main authority for a study of the Lord's prayer life. It is only Luke who tells us that the Lord prayed for Peter.

1. Christ often went apart to pray. When we study the references to Jesus' life of prayer we find that prayer was not simply a part of his life; it was his life. Prayer was a habitual attitude of his mind and heart. Prayer was the atmosphere in which he lived, it was the air that he breathed.

- (1) Christ turned aside to pray in the midst of an almost incredibly busy life, and while subjected to a constantly high pressure of work and ministry. No matter how busy he was, he turned aside for long seasons of prayer.

Christ insisted on these extended times of prayer. Luke chapter 6, verse 12. That this was a habit with Christ is well expressed by Luke in chapter 5, verse 15. These withdrawals in the midst of our Lord's busy life were frequent, according to grammatical construction in Luke 5:15. All the main words in this passage are in the plural. Not one but many withdrawals, many wildernesses, many prayers. All this high intercourse was going on the whole time. The withdrawals were repeated, the wildernesses were numerous, the prayers were habitual. The contrast between Christ and the multitude in Luke 5:13-16 is unmistakable. While they were milling around, in the grip of an excitement stimulated by Jesus' teaching and miracles, he sought sanctuary and solitude in prayer.

This is a great lesson for all Christians. How soon our puny resources are exhausted unless constantly replenished from the reservoirs of God. The harder Christ's day, the longer his prayer time. The busier he was, the greater his insistence on the practice of the presence of the Father. Apparently, Jesus Christ knew of no substitute for the daily practice of the shut door, the bent knee, the secret communion.

- (2) Christ turned aside to pray in the midst of spiritual conflict and death. He prayed at Gethsemane in Luke 22 verses 39 through 46. It is characteristic of Luke's account of the event in the Garden that it emphasizes the earnestness of Christ's prayers. The point Luke stresses is not the duration, but their intensity, the strained efforts which offering them involved. In Luke 4:13 the devil left Christ until a favorable opportunity should present itself; Gethsemane was such a time. In these prayers in the Garden, Christ was not for one moment abandoning the work the Father had given him to do, but he was asking, in effect, if the cross was really indispensable to the accomplishing of that mission.

"The
Camp"

Our Lord's experience in the Garden is of profound significance for the study of his doctrine and practice of prayer. Here in Gethsemane he shows, not by word, but by acts, what real prayer is. Real prayer is absolute self-surrender to, and absolute correspondence with, the mind, the will, the character, of God. The scripture says he began to be exceedingly sorrowful, he began to tremble and faint, and it

in communion with the Father that he strengthened himself for the fierce conflict of the cross that still lay ahead, chapter 22, verse 44.

Christ prayed on the cross. Luke 23:46. To the last, in spite of the horror of the last hours and the present moment, our Lord is still in communion with the Father.

What did prayer mean to Christ.

1. Prayer to Christ was thanksgiving. Luke 10:21

2. Prayer for Christ was also the taking of solemn counsel with the Father. Luke 6:12 - the choice of the 12 disciples. So momentous was the choice of the 12 that Jesus felt that a long vigil in prayer alone was essential.

We would do well to follow his example in this area of our prayer life. When we have important decisions to make we too may take counsel with God in prayer, and wait upon Him for guidance.

3. Prayer for Christ was intercession.

He prayed for Peter. Luke 22: verses 31 through 34. The figure of sifting wheat symbolizes the violence of the trial that would come upon Peter and his fellow disciples when Christ had been arrested and separated from them. Peter's ultimate denial showed how badly he needed this special help from the Lord in prayer.

Christ prayed that Peter's faith should not fail completely, for once and for all (the Greek rendering of Luke 22, verse 32). He did not pray that Peter should be spared Satan's sifting processes, nor even that he should be kept from falling. Apparently that fall was necessary to show an over-confident disciple what his fundamental weakness was. But Christ did pray that Peter's grievous fall should not be followed by a hardening of the heart or by a remorse that would drive him to eternal despair. That Christ's prayers were answered is clear from the sequel to Peter's denial. How precious the thought that the Lord of glory who prayed so effectively for Peter now prays for us as our High Priest before the throne.

Christ interceded for those who crucified him. Luke 23:34 This prayer for forgiveness was offered by the Lord on behalf of the Jews because they were crucifying him in ignorance. They did not know what they were doing at that moment, but they were in fact signing their spiritual death warrant.

In the first of the seven words from the cross our Lord was practicing his precept concerning love for one's enemies,

and the duty of praying for them as found in Luke 6:27.

These references to our Lord's intercessory prayers illuminate his present intercessions for us in glory. He is now our advocate who prays with us and for us. But our Lord's intercessions when he was on earth are also a severe rebuke to us.

4. Prayer for Christ was primarily and supremely communion. This is especially clear from Luke's account of the transfiguration, chapter 9, verse 28. It was as he was praying that he was transfigured.

Prayer of Glory: Prediction

(1) On the Mt. of Transfiguration, Christ's whole thought was concentrated on his approaching death. The transfiguration was at once the pledge of his future glory, and the prediction of his passion. During his communion with the Father on the Mt., Jesus Christ was completely absorbed in his determination to do the Father's will, even unto the death of the cross; and it was while he thus prayed and communed that he was transfigured. This is what those who desire the transfigured life should constantly remember, the transfigured life which results from the prayer life involves not only the solemn hour of high resolve and resolute purpose on the mount, but also the agony of conflict with a demon-possessed world on the plain, and the bloody sweat of Gethsemane, and the white-hot pain of Calvary.

Gethsemane

Rom. 12

*Preceding Verse:
See the Kingdom of God*

But the most significant point for us in the Transfiguration is that Christ was transfigured while he was praying. Prayer was the cause, the Transfiguration was the effect. Luke has already recorded in his gospel that it was while Jesus was praying after his baptism that the heavens opened, the spirit descended upon him, and the Father witnessed to him. Now it was while he was praying similarly that he was transfigured.

Perhaps the reason that Jesus took James and John and Peter with him to this mount to pray was he recognized in them an increasing mood of despair and realized that this despair and discouragement could best be overcome by prayer.



Luke's use of the Greek preposition en implies, not merely that while he was at prayer that Jesus was transfigured, but that prayer was the cause of the event. It was when his whole personality was engaged in prayer, and in the adoration and communion and contemplation and holy desire that constituted prayer for him, that he was illumined from within. It was an illumination that shone through the thin veil of his flesh from within.

But the fact that Luke makes the Transfiguration incidental to our Lord's original purpose - his search for privacy in order to pray - makes the event significant when we study the Lord's life of communion with the Father. The lesson here is that the transfigured life is the result of, or is determined by, the prayer life. On the holy ground of Christ's prayer life we learn that

only through prayer, which is face to face communion with God can we receive the great indispensable for the transfigured life.

Our Lord's experience on the Mount of Transfiguration shows that the divine glory is unveiled, and the divine voice is heard, only after the preparation of prayer that is communion with God. Prayer that is communion is the prayer that goes to God, not for what He gives, but for what He is.

Why did Christ have to pray. He was God but in his perfect humanity he recognized and submitted himself to, the law of dependance upon the Father; and it is at this point that the significance of the Lord's practice of prayer appears.

What significance should Christ's prayer life have for us today? If Jesus Christ prayed because in his humanity he felt the need to pray, how much more should we determine to become men and women of prayer? It is the act of Christ himself praying, not simply his doctrine of prayer, which demonstrates both the necessity and the privilege of prayer.

CHRIST'S TEACHING ON PRAYER

Jesus Christ gave himself so utterly to prayer that it was inevitable that he should give it a central place in his message. Of all the gospel writers Luke is the one who places greatest emphasis on prayer. The main lesson he is concerned to teach is the necessity for the soul's communion with God. He enforces that lesson by portraying Christ as the believer's example in prayer. The parables on prayer are used to teach the necessity for confidence and perseverance in prayer.

The characteristics of prayer.

*Persistence
over faithless
shamelessness*

1. Prayer should be characterized by importunity. Luke 11 verses 5 through 8. Jesus reminds them that they must learn to importune God in prayer. He has taught them to address God as Father. This would inspire in their hearts the confidence that their Father-God would be able and willing to give what they ask in prayer.

*MUST
IMPORTUNE
THROUGHOUT IN
PRAYER*

CAL HARRIS

(1) The implication in this parable of the importunate neighbor is that we may have to wait for the fulfillment of our prayers, but during the waiting period we are to importune God, knowing we shall receive what we ask in prayer as surely as this one received what he asked from his friend.

*Come at
important
time*

Illustration of Jacob wrestling with the angel.

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of his willingness.

2. The neighbor who was importuned at midnight objected not to parting with the bread but to the inconvenience to which he was put. Once persuaded that there was no peace for him until he acceded to his friend's request, got up and gave him as much as he wanted.

3. The lesson is that prayer is never out of season, never inopportune, but to be effective, it must be importunate.

4. It is worthy of notice that the man in the parable importuned his neighbor for the sake of a friend, not on his own behalf.

The exhortation that follows the parable provides another ground for the confidence that God responds to importunate prayers. The good things are given in response to importunate prayer as the three verbs in the present imperative, ask, seek, knock, imply. The ascending scale in the importunity is sig-

*Seek - Do
everything in their
power to receive
what they ask
Knock - urgency*

nificant; first the simple request, then the concentrated search as for a lost object, and finally the violent knocking as on a locked door. The secret to prayer is surrender to God's will and tenacity in prayer.

2. Prayer should be characterized by tenacity. Luke 18 verses 1 through 8. In the preceding verses Christ has been speaking of his second coming. Now in this parable he urges watchfulness in prayer in view of that event. The main lesson in this parable is that men ought always to pray and not to faint. verse 1. We must keep on praying tenaciously, a delayed response notwithstanding.

The point in the parable is not that the favor, once granted, is delayed; it is the lapse of time between request for, and the granting of, the boon that tempts men to think that prayer is a waste of time. It was the widow's perpetual coming that plagued the judge and finally moved him to pay attention to her plea. That is the point that Jesus emphasized: and if an unjust judge yields at last to the tenacity of a mere widow, how much more will the judge of all the earth respond to the tenacity of his elect who in prayer cry to him day and night? Delay in answering prayer is a reality, and Christ acknowledges it. The difference is in the reason for the delay.

If the unjust judge would grant the request how much more will God, being a heavenly father grant the believer's prayer. If God delays an answer to prayer it is in order to develop faith that would otherwise remain static; and also to deepen faith since it is tenacity in prayer in the face of disappointment that deepens faith. In spite of delay, faith is convinced that God will finally act to vindicate it.

3. Prayer is to be characterized by humility. Luke 18, verses 10 through 14. The publican's prayer arose out of humility, penitence, and an acute sense of unworthiness. The Pharisee's prayer was the expression of a proud, self-satisfied heart. In his so-called prayer, the Pharisee was concerned mainly with his profession of obedience.

The Pharisee's prayer was a prayer with or to himself. In it he congratulated himself on his spiritual attainments. Feeling the need of nothing, he asked for nothing, he simply shook hands with himself in prayer. His prayer was devoid of a sense of sin, hence his feeling of self-superiority. He actually hints that God is in his debt.

The publican's prayer shows first of all

1. Humility, which determined his disposition in prayer and the content of his prayer was it's chief characteristic.

1. He was humble before God, refusing even to lift his eyes toward heaven.

Why the delay in answering prayer

he didn't go to pray, he went to inform & know good he was.

(his mistake) compared himself to Publican, rather than to God. what he claimed was true.

Better than others: Delusion based on two facts:

*(1) Not a wicked person outwardly
(2) Performs certain exceptional religious acts*

Right attitude w/ which to approach God

Infected w/ self-conceit & contempt toward others.

Short prayer = attitude more important than words & length.

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2. He was humble toward his fellows, hence he stood afar off by himself.

3. He was humble toward himself. While he prayed he was beating himself upon his breast.

His sense of sin is expressed in his describing himself as the sinner - the Greek reads the sinner, not a sinner.

He was therefore conscious of his debt to God and with his inability to pay it which compelled him to cry for mercy. Divine grace was his only plea.

The essential of true prayer is self humiliation, the hallmark of false prayer is self elevation.

4. Prayer should be characterized by simplicity. 20-47, where all parade in prayer is condemned. In condemning all vain show and pretense in prayer our Lord shows the necessity for simplicity and the child-like spirit in prayer.

If it be asked, (why pray if God already knows what we need?) the answer is that we do not receive from God what we do not desire; and if we desire something we shall pray for it. Things that are worth getting from God are worth asking from God.

What are we to pray for. Luke 10:2. We are to pray for workers for missionaries. It is important to notice that the Greek in Luke chapter 10 verse 2 implies that the Lord of the harvest thrust forth his labourers with urgency, each one to his task at the right moment, and just where the need is greatest.

Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies. Luke 23:34, Luke 6:28. The enemies in mind are those who persecute Christians because of their faith, and are, therefore, those whom it is difficult to love. No hatred is so bitter as that which is generated by conviction concerning religion. Tolerance is not enough. The Christian is to love his enemies in a positive way. Persecution is to be met with love that expresses itself in prayer, prayer that is an invocation of blessing. The reason for this is NOT FAR TO SEE.

Acts of love may be repelled by enemies, the friendly word may be scorned by those who hate us, but prayer that enemies may be delivered from the evil that is their curse is a ministry that they cannot prevent the Christian from fulfilling; a ministry that is particularly dear to the heart of him who prayed for his enemies when they were nailing him to his cross.

1-NO PRAYER
CAN PRAY

2-CAN'T IF
DESPISE OTHERS

We are to pray for our selves.

(1) For the things that minister to our physical well being. Chapter 11, verse 13. The simple necessities of life such as food, shelter, clothing, and health. All things needful for the body are included in this general term bread. The point that Luke stresses is the continuity with which the Father supplies us with these essentials, the tense of the Greek in 11 verse 3 implying not the supply of these things this once, or on this particular occasion, but unflinching, for each recurring day.

(2) We are to pray for our deliverance from temptation and testing. 11 verse 4. Jesus commanded this to all the disciples in Luke 22, verse 40 and 46. In all these references temptation has reference both to the sorrows of life and to the direct assaults of Satan which test and refine the Christian.

The other request which Christians are to make for themselves in prayer is for the Holy Spirit, verse 13 of chapter 11. The Holy Spirit, a blessing so necessary to our growth in grace. This verse may be understood to mean that Christians are enjoined to pray for everything that is conducive and necessary to spiritual progress.

For Luke all of Matthew's "good things" are combined in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's influence and power are productive of good. There is in scripture a strong connection between prayer and the spirit. How practical then is this word in Luke 11:13. Arising as it does out of the parable of the importunate neighbor, Luke context suggests that the parable was a warning against stopping to pray when God seems to delay the answer to the prayer to the Holy Spirit for personal holiness, and growth in grace. Christ urges importunity in such prayer, assuring that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

True prayer originates in the frame of mind that asks God for something that will be a blessing and not a curse. Prayer is the recognition that we must not forget God, nor live in sinful dependence of Him. Christ did not always grant immediately the boon asked for, in order to create importunity and to test faith and character.

1. The Holy Spirit plays a significant role in the Lukan narrative. There are seventeen references to the Holy Spirit in the Gospel and fifty-seven in Acts. In contrast, Mark contains only six and Matthew twelve. Statistics, however, do not tell the story, because a characteristic pattern can be detected in many of the references to the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts.

2. The Holy Spirit is mentioned with unusual frequency in the first two chapters of the Gospel. The main burden, in this instance, is to show that the gift of prophecy had been revived under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This was the sign that the long-awaited New Age, the Age of the Messiah, had dawned.

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and recognized in Mary the mother of her Lord. (32) Zechariah filled with the Holy Spirit, pronounced the Benedictus. (33) Through revelation from the Spirit Simeon received assurance that he would live to see the Messiah, i.e., be present at the beginning of the New Age. (34) Under inspiration from the Spirit he was led to enter the temple when Jesus' parents brought him there for the ritual of presentation.

2. Luke places more emphasis on prayer than do the other evangelists. He stands alone in relating prayer to a number of the crucial events of Jesus' ministry. These include the baptism, (40) the calling of the Twelve, (41) the Great Confession, (42) and the Transfiguration. (43) He is also the only one who shows that the Lord's Prayer was given in response to a request inspired by Jesus' own experience in prayer. (44)

The parables of the Importunate Friend, (45) the Unjust Judge, (46) and the Pharisee and Publican (47) constitute examples of Jesus' teaching on prayer. The first two emphasize the need for persistence in prayer, a teaching relevant to Luke's day when men might have been tempted to lose heart in view of the delay in the hoped-for divine intervention in human history.

3. The Gospel according to Luke manifests a broad social concern as shown by the attention given to people who stood outside the pale of religious and moral respectability. Samaritans, tax collectors, sinners, and the poor are shown to be objects of Jesus' compassion.

The third gospel alone contains the story of Samaritan hostility to Jesus, (52) referred to in another connection in this article. The contrast between the disciples' hostility with its Jewish bias and the lack of it on the part of Jesus is clearly portrayed. The parable of the Good Samaritan, (53) contrasting the unfeeling attitude of the representatives of Jewish institutionalism with the genuine humanitarianism of the Gentile, is also given by Luke alone. In the story of the healing

of the Ten Lepers, (54) recorded only by Luke, the Samaritan is chosen as the ideal of genuine gratitude.

Jesus sympathy for tax collectors, hated tools of a despised foreign power, is attested by all the gospels, but especially by Luke. The reference to tax collectors who came to John for baptism, (55) the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, (56) and the story about Zacchaeus (57) are all from the special Lukan tradition.

The attitude of Jesus toward sinners is generally set in sharp contrast to the moral arrogance and exclusiveness of Pharisees. Jesus offered genuine acceptance to sinners, whereas they were regarded with contempt by the religious elite. Among the passages that illustrate this are the story of the penitent woman, (58) the three parables of the fifteenth chapter, and the conversion of Zacchaeus. (59) The modern reader is also indebted to Luke for the story about the forgiveness of the thief on the cross. (60)

The Gospel emphasizes the fact that the humble poor are recipients of the blessings of the New Age. Mary, the mother of Jesus, describes herself as one of their number. (61) She praises God as the one who has filled the hungry and rejected the rich. (62) The humble surroundings of Jesus' birth are a feature of Luke's account, (63) while lowly shepherds are the first to receive the good news of the Savior's birth. (64) The passage read by Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth begins with the declaration that the good news is to be preached to the poor. (65) The Lukan version of the first beatitude states simply: "Blessed are the poor. (66) At the same time, there is no parallel elsewhere to the series of woes pronounced by Jesus on the rich. (67)

4. Women play a significant role in Luke's writings. In the account of the birth of Jesus the spotlight is thrown on Mary, whereas Joseph plays an important role in Matthew. Elizabeth also figures prominently in the events described in the first chapter of Luke.

In the special material of the third gospel are found such stories as the raising of the widow's son, (68) the penitent woman, (69) the visit with Mary and Martha, (70) and the healing of the woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. (71) The Gospel also gives the interesting detail that a number of women provided support for Jesus and the disciples.

This feature, carried also through Acts, is noteworthy in view of the lowly and often degraded position occupied by women in the Greco-Roman world.

5. A characteristic attitude toward wealth runs through Luke's gospel. Wealth is generally suspect and the possession of it held to be perilous spiritually. The possession of wealth however, is not in itself condemned, in spite of the fact that material possessions are characterized as "unrighteous mammon." (72) The Gospel rather condemns the closed life of the person who uses his money only for himself or who thinks that the value of life is determined by the extent of his possessions. Two of the most vivid parables of Jesus, the Foolish

Farmer (73) and the Rich Man and Lazarus, (74) point out the folly of a secular approach to life. The only sin of the men in the stories is that they used their wealth solely for the gratification of personal desires.

According to the teaching in Luke, the person who possesses wealth is to share it with those who are deprived. John the Baptist says that the person who has two coats is to give one to him who has none. (75) Only Luke records the statement by Jesus to the effect that men should sell their possessions and give the proceeds to charity. (76) Zacchaeus' conversion is signaled by a changed attitude toward the gaining and use of wealth. He resolves to give half his goods to feed the poor. (77)

Luke was convinced that the gospel was applicable to the great social issues of his day and his presentation is colored throughout with a compassion for the exploited and the despised. The study of the third gospel should be a reminder that violence is done to the message of Jesus Christ when it is served from a concern for man's social problems.