

We find Him going to a desert place or to a mountain, separating Himself not only from the multitude, but also from His disciples, that He might spend a time with His Father in prayer. We see Him spending all night in prayer.

One of the disciples, beholding Jesus in the attitude of prayer, was so impressed with what he saw that when Jesus ceased praying he said to him, "Lord teach us to pray." And the Lord did teach them to pray. We shall try here to sum up His teaching on prayer under three heads.

#### I. THE MODEL OF PRAYER.

This prayer, generally known as the Lord's Prayer, is a pattern to guide us, rather than a form to be slavishly adhered to, and therefore we have a right to extend it by any additions that harmonize with its spirit. Notice some of the outstanding features of this prayer.

(a) *It is addressed to God as Father.* Jesus habitually addressed His prayers to the Father. "St. Luke is a classic on the eternal Fatherhood of God." (See what is said about the Fatherhood of God in Topic No. 1 in this series of Epworth Studies.) In the Old Testament God is an omnipotent King; in the New Testament He is an all-loving Father. The king may know his subjects en masse, but the father knows his family, each member personally. Our Father in heaven knows us personally, and knows us thoroughly. We are therefore encouraged to come trustingly into His presence when we pray.

(b) *This prayer consists of two parts.* The first, containing three petitions, refers to the glory of God; the second, containing three petitions, also, refers to the need of man. God's glory is put first and man's need second. This is in harmony with the dictum of Jesus, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." In our prayers do we remember the same rule?

(c) *The first part is a missionary prayer.* They who have no interest in the missionary cause do not offer this prayer. They cannot offer it sincerely. They may repeat the words, but that amounts to nothing more than the vain repetitions of the heathen which Christ condemned. Shakespeare puts it thus:

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;  
Words, without thoughts, never to heaven go."

(d) *There is no "I" in this prayer.* The pronouns are *thy* and *us*. In prayer there is no place for selfish exclusiveness. An old Socinian hymn is said to have contained these words: "Give rain and sunshine to Greiz, Schlez, and Lobenstein; and if others also wish them, they can ask for themselves." But our Lord teaches us that we must pray for others as well as for ourselves, and He himself has set us the example. Consider the following instances of our Lord's intercessory prayer: For His disciples, John 17; for children, Matt. 19.13-14; for Peter, Luke 22. 31, 32; for His enemies, Luke 23. 34.

#### II. THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER.

True prayer which brings an answer depends as much upon the spirit of the suppliant as upon the goodness and power of God. Real prayer is determined more by the spirit in which it is offered than by the form in which it is presented. What does Jesus teach as to the spirit in which prayer should be offered?

(a) *Right with God.* He teaches us that he who prays must be right with God. He must cherish the spirit of obedience to God (John 15. 7, 16). He must cherish the spirit of trust in God (Matt. 21. 22). He must cherish the spirit of submission

to God (Matt. 26. 39). No matter how anxious we may be concerning the object of our prayer, we should ever be ready to say, as Jesus did in Gethsemane: "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." Prayer does not mean that the mere wish of a man may determine the will of God.

(b) *Right with man.* He must cherish the spirit of forgiveness and charity (Matt. 6. 14, 15; Luke 11. 4). If we do not forgive those who have offended us we cannot expect God to forgive us. If we cherish ill-will towards others our prayer will not be heard. It is the prayer of the righteous man that availeth much (Jas. 6. 16).

"Forgive my foul murder!  
That cannot be; since I am still possessed  
Of those effects for which I did the murder."

My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.  
May one be pardoned and retain the offence?"

Shakespeare, in Hamlet.

(c) *Right in motive.* True prayer is offered in the name of Christ (John 14. 13, 14; 16. 23). This implies that all selfish purposes and unworthy motives find no place in prayer. "This prayer," in my name," says Stevens in *The Johannine Theology*, "involves certain conditions and limitations affecting prayer. It implies that we are to ask in Christ's spirit—the spirit of submission and trust—and in accord with the nature and

### EXAMINATIONS

NOTE.—Examination papers will be sent at any time to any person, on the first six of these Studies.—Just write the General Secretary.—All who have studied the six lessons already given, are invited to write. Any others may begin at any time.

aim of Christ's work for us. It excludes the idea that human desires can give the law to the divine order and that the human will can become determining for the Divine."

(d) *The spirit of perseverance.* Jesus spoke two parables illustrating the necessity of importunity in prayer (Luke 11. 5-8; 18. 1-8); but in both cases there were two things back of that importunity—the sense of deep, urgent need, and the spirit of dependence. Unless we see these two things we miss the lesson of these two parables. The poor widow may have been naturally shy, and inclined to shrink back from the presence of the lordly judge; she might have been willing to surrender her own rights rather than to have the appearance of being forward; but it was the very urgency of the case that led this naturally shy and modest woman to be so persistent. The man who begged bread from his neighbor may have been a good-natured man, always considerate of the feelings and needs of others; he might have been the last man on earth to think of disturbing his neighbor at such an inopportune time; but it was his deep sense of need, and the urgency of it that led him to persist in arousing his neighbor at this midnight hour. Persistent prayer is something more than a mere wish, it is the expression of a need, an urgent need, and, in this case, a need for others. Horace Bushnell said: "No prayer takes hold of God until it first takes hold of man. Importunity is impossible where there is not the sense of urgent need, and the spirit of dependence."

Akin to this is the spirit of contrition, illustrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luk. 18. 8-14).

Study the following instances of importunate prayer: Gen. 17. 16-33; 22. 24-34; Ex. 32. 11-14, 31, 32; Matt. 26. 36-46; Acts 1. 14; Rom. 1. 9.

#### III. THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

Prayer is the most powerful lever that God has put into the hands of man. By prayer he is able to move Heaven and earth.

(a) *Importunate prayer cannot be denied.* Ask, seek, knock. The suppliant must be ready to push his case to the end. Ask, seek, KNOCK—these words indicate three degrees of importunity. Bishop Hall said, "His promise is so sure that I know I shall receive what I prayed for, or what I ought to have prayed for."

(b) *Prayer succeeds where other means fail* (Mark 9. 29). See what our Lord says about prayer as a means of overcoming temptation (Luke 21. 36). See what he says about the power of united prayer (Matt. 18. 19). Do we fail here?

(c) *Prayer rests on the goodness of the Father.* The answer to prayer becomes a reality because of the love of the Father. This is its *causa sine qua non* (Luke 11. 11-13).

(d) *Examples of the power of prayer.* When Jesus was baptized with the Holy Ghost, He was in the act of praying (Luke 3. 21). When He came to His disciples walking on the sea, and stilled the storm, He had just come from a season of prayer in the mountain (Matt. 14. 23). We read that on a certain day while He was teaching, "the power of the Lord was present to heal them." But this wonderful success followed immediately after his season of prayer in the wilderness (Luk. 4. 1-14). Before his departure into the next towns to preach, as a fitting preparation, He rises up a great while before day that He might pray (Mark 1. 35). Before choosing His twelve apostles He fittingly spent all night in prayer (Luke 6. 12). It was while He was engaged in the act of prayer that he was transfigured before His disciples. It was after His prayer in Gethsemane that He was able calmly to surrender Himself into the hands of His enemies and meekly await His end, the calmest man in all that throng.

Is it any wonder that Luther succeeded in the reformation of Germany when he spent three hours a day in prayer.

"Morgan, I would rather train ten men to pray than a hundred men to preach," said George Macgregor to G. Campbell Morgan.

"Pray till prayer makes you forget your own wish, and leave it or merge it in God's will."—T. W. Robertson.

### Useful Advice

The late Bishop Potter was a wonderfully effective preacher, reserved and quiet. A clergyman who once delivered a sermon before the bishop told the following story:

"I was young and enthusiastic at the time, a disciple of the methods of Talma. I let myself go in this sermon. My voice shook the church. My gestures shook the pulpit."

"At luncheon, afterward, I am ashamed to say that I fished for compliments. I leaned over the bishop and asked him in a low voice to give me some advice on preaching."

"What he said was this:

"My dear young friend, never mistake, in the pulpit, perspiration for inspiration."

"The Christian is the world's Bible, but there is often need of a revised version."