

that, will yield to the entreaty of a poor widow how much more will God yield to the earnest prayers of His people! Compare verses 38-39.

(3) We are to pray with child-like simplicity and trust, verses 16-17.

We must always come before God as children coming to their heavenly Father. "Prayer is the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try."

Are you proving what a practical thing prayer is, that nothing is too great or too small to pray about and that prayer is the greatest work on this earth?

GROWING IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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Study 7

LEARNING TO PRAY

Scripture Portion: Luke 18:1-43

There is no greater work than the work of praying, for prayer is work of the highest order. Prayer means contact and fellowship with God; it is not simply asking God for things, though it does include that. Our Lord related the parable in Luke 18:1-8 in order to stress the great importance of prayer. Notice that in verse 1 He said that we "ought always to pray". It is the privilege of all to pray, and in this chapter we are given five examples:

- (1) **In verse 3**, we read of a praying widow.
- (2) **In verse 11**, we read of a praying Pharisee.
- (3) **In verse 13**, we read of a praying Publican.
- (4) **In verse 18**, we read of a praying Ruler.
- (5) **In verse 38**, we read of a praying Beggar.

1. WHY OUGHT WE TO PRAY?

There are many ways in which this question can be answered, but let us confine our answer to the suggestion that arises out of the word "ought". It simply means, "We owe it to pray...". Prayer is an obligation. In what sense is praying an obligation?

(1) We owe it to ourselves to pray.

In the infinite mercy of God, we have been given a new life; we have been made partakers of the divine nature, 2 Pet. 1:4, and this life can only be maintained by prayer. Only as we pray can our lives be what God wants them to be; only as we pray can we know the secret of victory over sin and over the power of the Enemy; only as we pray can our Christian service be what it ought to be.

(2) We owe it to others to pray.

Think what an amazing ministry we can exercise

on behalf of others if we know how to pray and if this is true, how solemn a thing it is not to pray for them! Look up 1 Sam. 12:23. As we think of the need, of the sin, sorrow and suffering and the broken hearts all around us, is it not an obligation resting upon us to pray for God's gracious relief and help and salvation to be given to these needy ones?

(3) We owe it to our Lord to pray.

In His Word, God has given us many "exceeding great and precious promises", 2 Pet 1:4, and each of these promises invites us to trust Him and to secure from Him all that we need for life and service. He has, as it were, given to us a blank checkbook; each check is signed with the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, John 14:13, and the resources of the Bank of Heaven are exhaustless, Phil. 4:19. We owe it to our Lord to cash these checks, to go to Him regularly in prayer and to draw upon the boundless supplies of divine grace and power which are available to us.

2. WHEN OUGHT WE TO PRAY?

The answer is "always"; which means at all times and in all circumstances, see Eph. 6:18 and 1 Thess. 5:17. Here are some practical suggestions as to when we ought to pray:

(1) At regular times.

We do many things every day by habit. We should likewise form the habit of prayer, look up Psa. 55:17, and compare Dan. 6:10.

(2) When the Holy Spirit urges us.

As surely as we go into the place of prayer so surely is the Holy Spirit present to guide us in our praying, look up Rom. 8:26-27. It is wonderful to be thus guided by Him to pray for someone for whom previously we had no thought of praying, and then afterwards to discover that our prayer had

been the channel through which God met a special need. Have you not had this experience?

(3) When cares and troubles press upon us.

The Lord gives a special promise for times of trouble, look it up in Psa. 50:15, and notice that His promise is not for deliverance *from* the trouble but for something better than this, deliverance *in the trouble*. Paul and Silas enjoyed such a deliverance, look up Acts 16:25.

(4) At all times of special need.

Such times arise in your life and mine, look up Acts 12:5, and compare James. 5:13-15 and 17-18.

(5) When we can, we should pray with others.

There is a place for private prayer, Matt 6:6, but there is a special invitation to, and a value in, united prayer, look up Matt 18:19-20 and Acts 1:13-14.

3. HOW OUGHT WE TO PRAY?

Consider three of the illustrations in this chapter which show us how we ought to pray.

(1) We are to pray like the Publican, and not like the Pharisee, verses 5:10-13.

We are to pray with no confidence in ourselves. All our confidence must be in the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for us so that we, though sinners, can approach a holy God in prayer, verse 13. If we come to God like the Pharisee He will not hear us, but if we come to Him as the Publican did, He will hear us.

(2) We are to pray importunately, without fainting, verses 1-8.

We so easily get discouraged when we pray if God does not seem to send the answer at once! Read this parable of the importunate widow. The lesson is this: If a bad man, and the Unjust Judge was