

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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TEACH US TO PRAY

Reading: Luke 11:1-13

Today's subject is one of the most important we may ever consider, it is so important in our lives each day, it can mean so much and it is so powerful we must carefully consider all aspects of it.

Firstly, what is prayer?

It is the way God allows us to speak to Him and to contact Him. How does he speak to us? Through our Bibles. So when we read our Bibles we are allowing God to speak to us, and when we pray we are speaking to Him. This is a great privilege and we must go about it in the correct manner – so we hope our lesson will help us do that.

The disciples had followed Jesus for many months and they noticed that Jesus spent long hours in prayer. They knew this must be important if Jesus prayed and they wanted the same experience. They asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. It did not come easy to the disciples and it does not come easy to us, so we can take guidance from the instructions Jesus gave to his disciples.

Wrong and right ways to pray.

Jesus told his disciples not to pray as the hypocrites. A hypocrite is a play actor, they are the type of people while they appeared to be worshipping God they were really cultivating the admiration of men. They loved to be seen of men choosing to pray on the corner of streets where everyone could see them and think they were righteous.

The place of true prayer is in secret when the door is shut and we are alone with God. Jesus also said that vain repetitions must be avoided. In other words we must avoid “mechanical” praying in which the same things are said over and over again in parrot-like fashion. Such prayers mean nothing to God however nice they sound. God wants us to pray from our hearts.

After giving these warnings, Jesus now told the disciples the right way to pray. Notice when Jesus gave what we have come to know as the Lord's Prayer he said that after this manner we should pray. He did not give us that prayer to repeat and repeat but as a model for us to copy, it gives us general lines to follow.

Notice the prayer is not long it comes straight to the point, it breaks up into four parts.

1. **Our Father which art in heaven.** The prayer begins with worship – not asking. We are allowed to call God our Father because we are called to be sons (and daughters) – see Gal 4:4
2. a) **Hallowed be thy name.** Today, God's name is used as a 'swear word'. This is terrible. Jesus tells us to hallow His name. We do that by thinking about His name which tells us His character. That He is merciful and gracious and kind and full of mercy. God's name will be honoured when Jesus returns to set up God's kingdom.
b) **Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.** Instead of personal requests again the Father is put to the front. We are told to pray for the time when God's will is in all the earth

and the evilness of man is a thing of the past. If we pray for this time to come, we must try **now** to do His will in our lives.

3. Now the prayer turns to man's needs.

a) **Give us this day our daily bread.** Notice we are not taught to ask for next week's bread or for great supplies in our cupboards. God wants us to rely on Him for our needs. Too much concern about our needs for food and clothes and for our future is a lack of faith. We pray that God will provide for our daily needs and we are showing we trust Him and He can provide all that we need. This does not mean we have all we want. Needs and wants are quite different.

b) **Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.** Asking for forgiveness is acknowledging we have sinned (this is the word debt) and need God's mercy and grace. God's forgiveness is freely available to those who are baptised into Jesus because there is no forgiveness without him. The extent that God will forgive is dependant upon our willingness to forgive. Jesus gives a parable in Matt 18:23-35 which shows how God views the man or woman who wants God to forgive them but is not prepared to forgive others.

c) **Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.** A true disciple is conscious of his weaknesses in trial and that he is liable to fail. So we must ask that we are kept away from anything which may cause us to offend God by our actions.

4. Praise to God.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen. As the prayer begins so it must end with praise and worship to God. God must come first before all our requests and we must always finish our thoughts with praise again.

So what have we learnt? How do our own prayers match up with the instructions of Jesus?

Let us try to put the points down one by one.

- Prayers must be in the name of the Lord Jesus as he is our High Priest.
- We must be honest and frank in our prayers.
- We should pray often.
- We must pray in faith knowing God can and will answer our prayer.
- We must be thankful for all God's gifts.
- In prayer we can ask for guidance and strength to do that which is right.
- God will forgive us, if we remember to forgive those who wrong us. Forgive and forget.
- Our prayers are always answers, but sometimes the answer may be "no", or "wait", or "not yet", so we have to have patience.
- We must learn to think and pray for others in their various needs.

In Luke 18:1-14, Jesus gives us two illustrations about prayer. I want you to read these verses carefully and then discuss the lesson Jesus is teaching about prayer.