

Lessons on Prayer

By Mark Moore, PhD

1. We pray to our father – this is truly new. Prayer is dependent on a relationship with God as Father (Luke 11:2; Mt 6:9; Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). This relationship is what gives us confidence to pray with such tenacious importunity (Luke 11:6-8; 18:1-8). This matches what we know about Jesus' most verifiable earthly prayer(s) – Mk 14:36; John 17:1; Heb 5:7-8 – they centered on his passion and God's fatherhood.
2. Praise is the precursor of valid petitions (Mt 6:9-10; cf. Isaiah 36:14-20).
3. We should ask for the very things Jesus told us to:
 - a. Laborers for the harvest (Mt 9:37-38; Luke 10:2)
 - b. Not to fall into temptation (Luke 22:40, 46)
 - c. Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13)
 - d. Wisdom (James 1:5)
 - e. Healing (Acts 28:8; James 5:13-14)
4. We should give more stress to corporate prayer, based on the model of the Lord's prayer. Look at how many plural first person pronouns there are.
 - a. It is our primary responsibility in ministry (Acts 6:4)
 - b. It is often connected with singing (Psalms; Acts 16:25; James 5:13-14)
 - c. It can be liturgical, written, and/or poetic; Zechariah (Luke 1:67-80); Mary (Luke 1:46-55).
5. We can ask anything and expect to receive it (Luke 11:9): In faith (Mt 21:22); in Jesus' name in order to glorify God (John 14:13-16; 16:23-26); we must remain in Jesus (John 15:7); in order to bear fruit (John 15:16); we must obey his commands (1 John 3:22); asking according to his will (1 John 5:14-15). Obviously, not every request is granted (cf. Mk 10:35). But our problem is usually not that we ask inappropriately but that we do not ask at all (Eph 3:20; James 4:2-3)
6. God may answer our prayers with a "Yes" (Job 23:1-7; 38:1-3; [Hezekiah] 2 Kings 20:1-11; 21:1), with a "Wait" (Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1; [Zechariah] Luke 1:13, 18), or with a "No" ([David] 2 Sam 7:11-13; [Paul] 2 Cor 12:7-10; [Jesus] Luke 22:42). We find that those to whom God said "Yes" were far less spiritual and blessed than those to whom he said "No." A negative response may indicate you are already where God wants you.
7. Looking at the major prayers of Acts (1:24-25; 4:24-31; 6:6; 7:59-60; 12:5; 13:2-3; 14:23; 16:25; 27:35), almost all of them derive from times of great need and/or stress. Hence, we tend to pray when we have no other recourse but God. If we don't pray much, it is likely because we have so insulated ourselves that we don't need God. Jesus' prayers in Luke bear this out as well. He prayed during especially critical points in his life (3:21 [baptism]; 6:12 [Appointing Apostles]; 9:18 [Peter's great confession], 28 [Transfiguration]; 41 [Gethsemane]; 23:34 [on the Cross]).
8. When should we pray? There is no set pattern. The Jews had special hours of prayer (morning, noon, and evening) (cf. Acts 3:1; 10:3), as well as before meals (Mt 14:19; 26:26; Acts 27:35; 1

Tim 4:3). But both Jesus and the church prayed at various times. While there is one example of Jesus praying early in the morning (Mk 1:35) there are more examples of him praying late into the night (Mt 14:23; Luke 6:12; 9:28). The clearest statement of when to pray is perhaps still the most perplexing – we should pray always! (1 Thess 5:17-18).

9. It has been said that prayer doesn't change the mind of God but the heart of the person praying. If that were true then how did Moses change God's mind (Exo 32:9-14)? How does the prayer of a righteous man accomplish much (James 5:16)? And why are we bidden to ask, seek and knock (Mt 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10).
10. We have the power of imprecatory prayer or blessing. We can actually bring *Shalom* to people or God's curse against their sin and rejection (Mt 18:18-20; Luke 10:5-6; John 20:23; Acts 4:29-30).