

12 Foundation Stones—Class 3A

Principles and Practice

Prayer, Part 1

Section 1: Prayer Principles

We want to start our study of prayer by looking at our relationship with the Lord. Prayer is not a ritual. The position of your body doesn't matter very much. What counts is the position of your heart. When we talk about prayer we're talking about your relationship and communication with the Lord and His relationship and communication with you.

➤ **Our constant Companion**

God sent Jesus into the world to be our Savior. He is the Son of God. God also sent Jesus into the world so that through Him we could develop a relationship with God. God is too big, too infinite for our understanding. We don't know what He looks like. We can't really picture Him in our mind's eye because He is too vast.

But we can think of Jesus. We can comprehend and picture Jesus, because He took on the form of a man and lived a life here on Earth.

Jesus came to save us for eternity, and He also came to be our companion through life. You can picture Jesus as a constant Companion Who is always beside you and to Whom you can go for counsel and comfort.

Here is a little story about this:

■ **"Jim, It's Jesus!"**

The story is told of a certain minister who was disturbed to see a shabby old man go into his church at noon every day and come out again after a few minutes. What could he be doing? He informed the caretaker and asked him to question the old man. After all, the place contained valuable furnishings.

"I go to pray," the old man said in reply to the caretaker's questioning.

"Come, come now," said the other, "you are never long enough in the church to pray."

"Well, you see," the shabby old man went on, "I cannot pray a long prayer, but every day at twelve o'clock I just come and say, 'Jesus, it's Jim,' and wait a minute and then come away. It's just a little prayer, but I guess He hears me."

When Jim was injured some time later and taken to the hospital, he had a wonderful influence on the ward. Grumbling patients became cheerful and often the ward would ring with laughter.

"Well, Jim," said the sister to him one day, "the men say you are responsible for this change in the ward. They say you are always happy."

"Aye, sister, that I am. I can't help being happy. You see, it's my Visitor. Every day He makes me happy."

"Your visitor?" The sister was puzzled. She always noticed that Jim's chair was empty on visiting days, for he was a lonely old man, with no relations. "Your visitor? But when does he come?"

"Every day," Jim replied, the light in his eyes growing brighter. "Yes, every day at twelve o'clock He comes and stands at the foot of my bed. I see Him and He smiles and says, 'Jim, it's Jesus.'"

➤ **Prayer is praise, petition, listening**

We've seen how prayer is our communication with the Lord. Understanding these three principles of prayer will enhance your relationship with the Lord: 1) praise, 2) petition, and 3) listening. We'll talk about these in more detail during the next classes, but in brief:

➤ **Praise**

The Lord gives a lot of instruction in His Word that you should come into His presence with thanksgiving and enter His courts with praise. Thank and praise the Lord! Give Him the praise and honor that is His due.

Psalm 100:4—Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

➤ **Petition**

After you've thanked the Lord for what He has already done for you and given you, then you can pray for what you still need. He encourages us to ask:

John 16:24b—Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

➤ **Listening**

Prayer is not a one-way street where you're just asking the Lord for things, but it's communication with the Lord, conversing with the Lord. A lot of people have a conversation with the Lord and it's a one-way conversation. They talk to Him and tell Him everything they want, but they never give Him time to say anything!—Except they hope He'll say "yes" to whatever it is they're asking Him for. After they've given Him their long list, they then hope that He okays it!

That isn't the way it should be! Your relationship with the Lord should also include you listening to Him. Prayer is not just speaking your piece, but most of all letting God speak His piece, and waiting in quietness and confidence until He answers. Take time to hear from God, and He'll take the time to straighten out your problems.

Mark 4:2–3—Then He ... said to them in His teaching: "Listen!"

Mark 7:14b—He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand:"

➤ **Concentration and visualizing Jesus**

John 4:24—God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

When you pray, think about the Lord and visualize Him if you can.

It's good to shut your eyes. You don't have to shut your eyes to pray, you don't even have to bow your head, but it generally helps. Shutting your eyes closes out everything else that's distracting and opens the inner eyes of your mind and heart and you can think of and even visualize Jesus.

Try to close your mind to other things and distracting thoughts. If you make an effort to concentrate on Him, you're less likely to think of other things or be distracted while you pray. You're thinking about the Lord! Isaiah wrote,

Isaiah 26:3—You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.

You can't think of too many things at once. There may be a few peripheral things around the fringes of your mind, but your concentration can only be focused on one point at a time. When you pray, that focal point needs to be the Lord!

Jesus on the chair

F.W. Boreham, the writer, tells the story of an old Scot who lay very ill. His minister came to see him. As the minister sat down on a chair near the bedside he noticed on the other side of the bed another chair placed at such an angle as to suggest that another visitor had just left it. "Well, Donald," said the minister, "I see I am not your first visitor."

The Scotsman looked up in surprise; so the minister pointed to the chair. "Ah," said the sufferer, "I'll tell you about that chair. Years ago I found it impossible to pray. I often fell asleep on my knees, I was so tired. And if I kept awake, I could not control my thoughts from wandering. One day I was so worried I spoke to my minister about it. He told me not to worry about kneeling down. 'Just sit down,' he told me, 'and put a chair opposite you, and imagine Jesus is in it, and talk to Him as you would to a friend.'" The Scotsman added, "I have been doing that ever since. And so, now you know why the chair is positioned like that."

A week later the daughter of the old Scot drove up to the minister's house and knocked on the door. She was shown into the study, and when the minister came in she could hardly restrain herself. "Father died in the night," she sobbed, "I had no idea death could be so near. I had just gone to lie down for an hour or two, for he seemed to be sleeping so comfortably. And when I went back he was dead. He had not moved since I had last seen him, except that his hand was on the empty chair at the side of the bed. Do you understand?" asked the daughter.

"Yes," said the minister, "I understand."

➤ **Praise Time**

① *Take some time to praise the Lord now.*

We give You glory, Lord! You dwell in the praises of Your people; You inhabit the praises of Your people! We love You, Jesus! You put our feet on the Rock! (Psalm 40:2). You've done so much for us! We exalt Your name! Thank You for Your love! Thank You for Your care! Jesus, help us to praise You more, to give You the glory that You deserve, the glory that's due Your name. Help us to honor You before the people, before each other! Everything that we get accomplished, everything that we do is through Your grace and power, Jesus! Hallelujah!

Please bless our relationship with You, that we would be closer to You. Help us to learn to acknowledge You in all our ways, and to take time with You each day. We love You, dear Lord, and thank You for the wonderful gifts You've given us. You're the best gift of all!

Section 2: Twelve Steps of Effective Prayer

Prayer works! We'd like to spend a few minutes telling some testimonies of how God has answered prayer, and then we'll examine the twelve steps to help your prayers accomplish what you want them to.

➤ **Testimonies of how God answers prayer**

Healing testimonies

From Manuel: "One night we were talking about Jesus to a girl who visits us often and loves God's Word. She had brought her friend with her for us to witness to her and the Lord led us to share with her about healing and the importance of prayer. When they returned home they found out that the friend's baby was sick with a high fever! So they both prayed for the baby and the Lord did a miracle and healed the baby right before their eyes! Needless to say, this inspired them both that it pays to put their trust in the Lord."

From Nigel: "A friend who is a barber was, at first, quite cold to our message and our work. We prayed for the Lord to change him and when we visited him, we found him crying! He told us that he had throat cancer. We witnessed to him and he received Jesus as his Savior. We specifically prayed for his healing and he told us that he felt the Lord touching him. The next time he visited the doctors they didn't find anything wrong with him! Now he's faithfully studying the Word."

From Alison: "One day I got a phone call from my sister who desperately asked me to come and pray for her two-week-old daughter who was in the hospital dying of bronchial pneumonia! The doctors said it was too late and that it was an impossible and hopeless situation and she would surely die! My parents and brother-in-law were staunch unbelievers at this time. So I explained that my prayers couldn't save their little girl if they didn't get their hearts right with God and pray desperately for a miracle. I told my brother-in-law that maybe the Lord wanted to show him that He exists and that He loves him and if he prayed to Him with his whole heart, God could heal his daughter right away! Finally, he felt a need for the Lord and he humbled himself and prayed, asking the Lord to do a miracle! The next day the doctors were going to do some tests in order to find out more precisely what the baby's condition was. So we prayed specifically that when the doctors did their tests they would find the baby completely healed. That is exactly what happened! The next day the baby was completely well and there was no explanation whatsoever! It was a miracle! After this my brother-in-law started witnessing to all his friends and the people he works with, telling them that God really does exist and that He saved his baby's life!"

Transformed!

From Emma and Corrie, Russia:

When we went to visit a close friend, she wasn't there, but her best friend, Olga, was. When she realized we were the Christians her friend had told her about, Olga began asking us different questions about God and His ability to protect His children. She went on to tell us that her husband had started to drink, and at times seemed almost psychotic. He would change from a gentle, loving husband, to a violent monster. To add to her fears, she had found an unexplained weapon in their home. "I'm so desperate, I'm willing to try anything," she said.

We told Olga about the power of prayer, and what it has done in our lives. Then we encouraged her to be honest with her husband and tell him how she felt. We prayed with her, and assured her that the Lord was able to change her husband and their situation.

When we bumped into Olga a couple of days later, she threw her arms around us, and hugged us. She said she had taken our advice, told her husband how she felt, and listened to what he had to say. As a result, he had stopped drinking and their relationship was much better already. She told her husband that we had prayed with her, and they both credit the Lord with changing their lives. Now they want to learn more about God, the Bible, and prayer.

➤ **1. Have a praiseful, thankful attitude**

Key principle: Please Him by praising Him!

Before you begin to list all the things you would like God to do, take a minute to praise and thank Him for all He has already done.

Philippians 4:6—With thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

(We'll further explore the principle of praise in the next class.)

➤ **2. Start with a clean heart**

Key principle: "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10).

Before you can have faith that the Lord will answer your prayers, you need to be sure that things are right between the Lord and you.

1 John 3:20–22—If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

Psalms 32:5—I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

If you have done wrong, what you need to do to set things straight is to acknowledge your guilt, ask the Lord to forgive you, and pledge to try to rectify the matter or be reconciled with any others involved. Once you do that, the Lord is quick to forgive, and to hear and answer your other prayers.

1 John 1:9—If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God does not ask for perfection. He only asks that we put our will over on His side; that with all our heart we try the very best we know how. Let us pray, as David of old,

Psalms 51:10—Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalms 139:23—Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties.

➤ **3. Pray for God's will to be done**

Key principle: The best way to know God's will is to say *I will* to God.

When you are doing your best to please the Lord, then it pleases Him to grant you your heart's desires.

Psalms 37:4—Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.

1 John 5:14–15—Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

➤ **4. Put the needs of others ahead of your own**

Key principle: "Jesus," then "others," then "you" spells J-O-Y!

God expects us to pray not only for ourselves, but also for others.

Job 42:10—And the Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

1 Thessalonians 1:2—We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.

Psalms 31:1—Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.

(We'll talk more about our responsibility to pray for others in the next class.)

➤ **5. Be specific**

Key principle: Specific prayers get specific answers.

Jesus wants us to be definite in our requests. He asks us,

John 15:7—"What would you have Me do for you?"

Specific prayers get specific answers. Vague, aimless prayers usually indicate one of three things: Either you're not very concerned, or you don't really know what you want Him to do, or you don't have faith that He can do it. So be as clear and definite as you would if you were writing a check drawn on the Bank of Heaven. Fill it out for the exact amount you want, make it payable to yourself or someone else who needs it, date it, sign it—and it's yours!

We are definite in our business dealings with others—especially in any matter of importance that involves a money transaction. How careful we are to have a perfect understanding. We say we are "making a deal" or "closing a deal" with a person, and there comes a time when we sign our name on the dotted line and in a very definite, careful manner, we close the deal. Just so, there must be a definiteness in closing a deal with God. There must be a definite moment in which we, so to speak, sign our name on the dotted line under His promises, take Him at His Word, and close the deal.

➤ **6. Be wholehearted**

Key principle: It's not how long you pray or how much you pray, it's how much you believe.

It's true that God knows what you need before you even ask Him, but He still expects you to pray. It shows that you are depending on Him, that you need Him. It's a positive declaration of your faith that He can answer your prayers, and that pleases Him.

God wants you to show concern and pray about things.—And in serious matters, He expects you to be serious about asking for His help. If you stir yourself, God will stir Himself!

Jeremiah 29:13—You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

➤ 7. Exercise your faith

Key principle: When faith goes to market it always takes a basket.

What is faith? It's taking God at His Word. It's believing that what He has promised, He will do. With faith, it doesn't matter whether reason or logic point in that direction; you just know it will be because God promised it so, whether your human mind can figure it all out or not.

The greater your faith in the Lord's ability to answer, the greater answers to prayer you will receive. These two contrasting examples demonstrate the point especially well: When two blind men besought Jesus to restore their sight, He asked them if they believed He was able to do so. When they answered yes, He told them that it would be done to them "according to their faith"—and He proceeded to heal them!

Matthew 9:27–30—When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" (28) And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." (29) Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." (30) And their eyes were opened.

But another time we read that He didn't do many miracles in one town because of the people's unbelief.

Matthew 13:58—Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

So it's pretty clear that your measure of faith determines the measure of God's response.

How do you build your faith muscles? You nourish them with God's Word, and exercise them daily through prayer.

■ The one who gets things from God will show his faith by his actions.

James 2:17–18,26—Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (18) But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ... (26) For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

What is a dead faith? It is a faith that is not working. It is a faith that is not operative. Real faith is not a passive thing; it will act out what it believes.

A believing person puts faith into action. When he has asked God for something, he proceeds as if he possesses. When he takes God at His Word on some promise, he proceeds exactly as if he already possesses the thing which he desires (which by believing faith he really does), though the natural senses may deny every step of the way that which faith has claimed as true.

An illustration of this thought is given in the Bible in the instance of the lepers who were told by Jesus to go show themselves to the priest for cleansing; the Scripture says,

Luke 17:14—As they went, they were cleansed.

As they went, as they put their faith into action, God did it. If we put forth the effort of a believing will, God honors that step and does it. Look at the case of the man with the withered hand.

Matthew 12:10,13—And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. ... (13) Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

The seat of faith is in the will. God certainly expects us to put our faith into action.

➤ 8. Pray in the name of Jesus

Key principle: There is power in the name of Jesus!

When Jesus came to Earth to die for our sins, He became our Mediator with God, the Father. The Bible tells us:

1 Timothy 2:5—For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

We approach God via Jesus.

John 14:6—Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

We know that's true of salvation, but this is true also of prayer! Jesus repeatedly told His disciples to pray in His name:

John 14:13–14—And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

John 16:23b–24—Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. (24) Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

➤ 9. Claim God's Word

Key principle: Quote Scripture when you pray. Hold God to His Promises.

God has a storehouse of matchless treasures and infinite wealth, all that you could ever ask or need or imagine—and it's all been promised to you in His Word.

2 Peter 1:4—There have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature.

All you have to do is lay claim to the promises!

God's Word is a contract that He has bound Himself to. The first step is to familiarize yourself with the terms of the contract. You do that by reading His Word. Then, when you pray, He wants you to hold Him to those terms. When you remind Him of His promises, it shows you have faith in what He has said, and that you believe He is able and will do what you are asking.

Of course, the contract also has terms that you must fulfill. Many of God's promises come with conditions.

1 John 3:22—Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

In order to claim His promise, "whatever you ask," you must do your best to keep His commandments and please Him. When you keep your part of the bargain, you can boldly claim all that is rightfully yours according to His Word.

Memorize a few key promises to claim when you pray. They will greatly strengthen your faith in time of need. Besides the verses you have committed to memory, you can also claim verses by reading them.

Favorite verses

Here are a few promises that have been favorites for many of us over the years:

John 15:7—If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Mark 9:23—Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

Jeremiah 33:3—Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.

➤ **10. Refuse to doubt**

Key principle: When you pray—believe!

James 1:6–8—Ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Refuse to entertain any thoughts that contradict the Word.

It has been said that there are two different kinds of Christians—those who pray and really expect to see something happen, and those who just pray but do not expect anything to happen. Accept that God has answered even before you see the answer!

Mark 11:24—Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

When you pray—believe! It is simply amazing how many people, who, after having asked God to do the giving actually expect Him to do the taking, also! We want Him, without the least effort on our part, to come right down and lay it in our laps instead of us reaching up and receiving it. He will give us what we're asking Him for, but on His own conditions, and those conditions are: "Believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

➤ **11. Count it done**

Key principle: "Stand fast in the faith" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Every prayer that is in line with God's will and according to what God wants and knows is best for everyone involved, is answered—as far as God is concerned—before the prayer itself is even finished.

Isaiah 65:24—It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

He may not answer the way we expect Him to, or we may not see the answer right away, but God has set things in motion to be fulfilled in His time, providing it's His will. So once you have presented your request to the Lord, it's time to take what is known as the "stand of faith." You must trust that the answer is on its way, and believe that if you've fulfilled your part of the bargain, He will come through for you, even if it sometimes takes a while. Count it done!

(We'll look more at the subject of delayed answers to prayer as well as unexpected answers in the next class.)

➤ **12. Thank God for answering**

Key principle: What we win by prayer we must wear with praise.

It's just as important to end your prayers with praise and thanksgiving, as it is to start them that way.

Just like we get specific with God in the things we ask for, we should be just as specific in thanking Him for the things He gives us. Let's get just as enthusiastic in thanking Him, as we were desperate in asking Him!

If you really believe that God has heard and answered your prayer, you won't wait till you see the answer to thank Him for it; you'll thank Him by faith.

➤ **Review of the Twelve Steps**

1. Have a praiseful, thankful attitude.
2. Start with a clean heart.
3. Pray for God's will to be done.
4. Put the needs of others ahead of your own.
5. Be specific.
6. Be wholehearted.
7. Exercise your faith.
8. Pray in the name of Jesus.
9. Claim God's Word.
10. Refuse to doubt.
11. Count it done.
12. Thank God for answering.

Ending note

There are other aspects of prayer that we haven't had much time to get into, such as delayed answers, types of prayer, how to form good prayer habits, more on praise, listening to the Lord, and so on. These are subjects we will be discussing in our next class.