

Title: How Should We Pray?

Text: Luke 18:1-14

Will you take your Bibles, please, and turn to Luke chapter 18. Luke chapter 18. The subject is: HOW SHOULD WE PRAY? The fourth and final message in our series. HOW SHOULD WE PRAY? Luke chapter 18 beginning at Vs 1 and reading down through verse 14.

(Read Luke 18:1-14)

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY? I give you two words. HABIT AND HUMILITY.

How interesting that God would use an unjust judge as a type of the just God of all the earth. How interesting that he would tell us that this woman who continually knocked down his door for an answer represents us who continue to come to the Lord and ask Him to answer prayer. And then to follow it up with a whole lesson on humility. It is indeed remarkable.

WILL YOU JOIN ME IN PRAY AS WE BEGIN.

FATHER we need to know how to pray. We remember how the disciples ask you to teach them how to pray. And so Father we ask you to teach us to how to pray this morning.

Father, we have realized throughout our study that you are a God of miracles. You are a God that can do abundantly above all that we could seek or ask. You have told us that if we have the faith of a grain of mustard seed we could say to a mountain, "be removed", and it would be. You have

told us so many assuring and comforting and encouraging things. And you have invited us to come into your presence and pray. God I pray that as we examine the question of HOW TO PRAY? that you will open up our minds and our hearts to this wonderful, wonderful privilege of ours that we call prayer. We thank you in Jesus name. Amen.

Now, if you like to outline or follow along in the notes, I am going to give you four things today.

(1) And the first one that I want to deal with is so very important. Yet many Christian are afraid to raise this issue. The first thing I want to talk about is that prayer is a problem when the following four things exist. Maybe one of the reasons why God is not answering prayer in your life is one of the following four things.

Turn to Proverbs 28, please. Proverbs chapter 28. These are what we call the classical hinderence to prayer. Prayer becomes a problem when the following four things exist.

(1)Number one is sin that we do not confess or forsake. Now, mind you God has given us access into his presence regardless of whether or not we deal with our sin. We have been forgiven, cleansed, santified, and justified. And we have access into His presence on the bases of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank God for that. And I can come directly to God because he died and paid for my sin. But the the truth of the matter is that sin that is

entertained and coveted and keep in the heart and refused to deal with it, does become a hinderance to God answering prayer.

God may receive us and listen to us. But, God has certain rules and standards by which he operates. And when there is sin in our heart that we will not confess and forsake, God has indicated in His Word that this is going to hinder our prayer life.

Proverbs 28 verse 9 says "He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination."

And Vs 13 says "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper. But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

God has one message as to what we should do about sin in our life. And that is to confess it and stop it. We are to acknowledge it before God and repent. And that means to stop it. Change our mind about continuing it. Change our conduct about continuing to do it. And stop it.

Pray will always be a problem when sin is not confessed. When sin is not forsaken. When we decide that we do not need to listen to the LAW OF GOD --then the LAW OF GOD comes into play, and that is: PRAYER BECOMES AN ABOMINATION. And God simply refuses to answer. Because we decide that we don't want to listen to what His Word has to say.

(2) Turn to Matthew chapter 6. Prayer is also a problem when an unforgiving spirit comes into a person's life. And unforgiving spirit.

I don't know how many people are controlled by an unforgiving spirit. Or, how high on the list of sins that trouble Christians. But, I have a feeling that this is a biggie. An unforgiving spirit.

There are people around us who will fail us. They will not live up to our expectations or their own. People who will not perform like we want. And my friends an unforgiving spirit is a terrible thing. An unforgiving spirit assumes that somehow the person does not deserve our forgiveness.

Well I can clear that up right now. No one does. I was talking with a man who was having trouble with another guy in the church. And as we talked I said to him.. "I get the impression that believe that this man doesn't deserve your forgiveness?" And he said, "You are right." He doesn't because he keeps doing it over and over again."

I said, "well, I just want you to know that you don't deserve forgiveness either."

He said, "I didn't do anything wrong."

I said, "Well, you just did. You just lied. We all do wrong."

Dear friends, we all do wrong. And aren't you glad that God forgives you. He just wipes it clean. He forgives us.



And a lot of us just haven't understood that. So, we hesitate to apply forgiveness to someone because we are offended. This is a very interesting problem.

But look at what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6 verse 14: "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But, if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

What a tremendous principle. How we relate to other people in our forgiveness hinders our prayer life. If you are not convinced of that, turn to *Matthew chapter 18. Let me give you a stronger illustration.*

In Matthew 18 we find a fascinating story about forgiveness. And the illustration is being given to Peter. Peter came to Jesus in Vs 21 and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times."

A perfect number. I mean, come on...SEVEN TIMES? "Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but just two or three." IS THAT WHAT JESUS SAID?...NO...'SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN.'

One writer that I was reading said that is 490..NO! ..It is not. It means, ENDLESS...It doesn't matter how many times they offend you. How many times they have sinned against you. JESUS SAID TO FORGIVE THEM.

Now, the illustration. Vs 23....(Read Vs 23-34)

Can you imagine Jesus telling this story? Poor Peter You can tell what he is thinking by now. O.K. O.K. I get the point.

Vs 35, Jesus said, "And so shall my heavenly Father also do to you, if

each of you does not forgive his bother from your heart."

Off hand, would you say that an unforgiving spirit is a slight problem in the Christian life.? Now, I don't know what you are thinking about right now. But, is there somebody, right now, that you are totally unable to forgive? Anyone come to mind?

Well, FORGIVE THEM, RIGHT NOW. FORGIVEN them right now on the bases of what the Lord Jesus has done for you.

Well, if they come to me and beg for it, I might.

No, just forgive them, right now. On the bases of what Jesus has done for you. No other reason.

Well, don't you think there ought to be some kind of repentence?

Now, that is an interesting question. Turn to Luke chapter 17. Luke chapter 17. Do you know that some people will not repent. Have you noticed that? I remember two older ladies in a former church of mine that had a grievance against one another and both insisted that the other one was wrong. And they were both sure that they were right. And this went on and one. And other folks tried to counsel them. But to no avail. To my knowledge they both died and never did settle it. I just want everyone to know that they are both dead. And they are with the Lord, I assume, because they both claimed to be Christians. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT IT IS NOW SETTLED.

Have you ever thought about that? Why in the world are you eating your heart out because the day you die, I have news for you, the whole

things is settled...AMEN!

I think some of us, because bitterness is so deep, believe we will get it settled up in heaven. NO..NO..You will not even be discussing it. Not even an issue anymore. The moment you die it is all over. Problem settled..Case closed.

Now, why can't we do that right now?

Luke 17 verse 3 says "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, I repent, forgive him."

Now, the problem with this text is that it doesn't tell us what to do if he doesn't.

It says if he does repent then forgive him. And I know a host of Christians who say, "well, what that means is, if he doesn't repent then you don't forgive him."

Now, it doesn't really say that. But, we draw that conclusion. But, you see on the bases of Matthew chapter 18 you would have to conclude the opposite. That if you have been forgiven by the Lord, to whom you owe more. Then the least you can do is forgive someone else regardless of whether he wants to do anything about it or not. Just forgive him.

Now, there is the problem of what we call "cheap forgiveness." Somone comes to you and says, "Hay, I am sorry. I know I stold \$60,000 from you. And I am not going to pay it back. But, I am sorry. O.K.

Hay! that is all I need. I forgive you.

Every body happy with that answer?

I just love watching the audience, right now. This is so much fun.

Listen, unforgiveness can just eat you alive.

Think about it? What if no one ever paid you back. What if no one ever repented. What if no one ever said they were sorry. What if they keep doing it.

NOW WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

You see, isn't it interesting that when you want to apply forgiveness you always think of what the other person is doing. Whether they are repenting or getting right with the Lord or settling it, or what ever. **WHAT**

IF THEY NEVER DO IT?

Hay! aren't you glad the Lord does it differently with you? You see, He doesn't punishes us according to our sin. He forgives us on the bases of what Jesus has done. And He is the one in the story that forgave the larger debt. And what He has done, is the motivation for us to forgive others.

I like what one writer says, "no one really understands the depth of forgiveness untill the person never repentence. How true that is.

I know that some of you could write a paper, now, ON WHAT I JUST SAID IS WRONG. And believe me, if you have offended someone, I do believe you ought to try to get it all straightened out. You ought to try to resolve it. And the Christian attitude is to try to get it straightened out. And to seek the forgiveness of someone you offended. I believe all of that.

But, I have seen good christian people who have been sinned against and been offended against, have been literally eaten alive by an unforgiving spirit. And then they wander why they don't receive the blessings of God in prayer. We have better learn. An unforgiving spirit is a problem in the issue of prayer.

(3) Ther is a third thing. Turn to I Peter chapter 3. I Peter chapter 3. Prayer is a problem when there is a wrong relationship between husband and wife.

I Peter 3:7 And in this case the burden of proof is on the husband not on the wife. Vs 7 "You husbands likewise".....

Back to Vs 1.. "In the same way, you wives, be submissive"

Back to chapter 2 verse 18.. "Servants, be submissive to your masters."

Vs 21, Christ left and example.

Chapter 3 verse 1... "wives be submissive."

What is the point? Likewise to the Lord. Be submissive like the Lord.

Vs 7 "You husbands, likewise, would be ..be submissive like the Lord.

O.K. how are husbands submissive to their wives?

First, by living with them with understanding. By trying to understand them. I believe that all husbands would identify with me on this point. That it indeeds takes a submissive spirit to understand women....AMEN?...

Sorry, Ladies, but that is just the way it is..

How to men submit to their wives? Number one, by tryig to understand them. Number two, by giving honor to the wife. How does a man submit? By giving honor. You see, he has already been told by God that he is the head. So, it is kind off interesting that God says to the head, "No, we are not going to honor you. We are going to honor the one who is under you. Give honor to the wife. That has always been God's way.

Now, you want to be lifted up? You want to be honored? GREAT! Then be a servant of all. Husbands give honor to the wife.

You say, "Well, I don't want to give her a big head. You can honor her to much." Hay! let God handle that, O.K. I find that God has wonderful ways of handling that. What He has told you to do is to honor your wife.

Third, it says that you are fellow-heirs of the grace of life. That means that you are partners. You are partners of what God has done in your life. You are not better than she is.

Now, look at this next line. "THAT YOUR PRAYERS MAY NOT BE HINDERED." The Greek word is "cut off." Boy, that is pretty strong, isn't it?

So, according to the Bible the prayers of husbands are hindered or cut off by God when they in fact do not understand or honor their wives. When they think that they are better than they are. That is pretty strong, isn't it?

(4) Number four. Do you want to know when prayer is a problem? Turn to Matthew chapter 17. Prayer is always a problem when there is a lack of faith. A lack of faith. I guess most of us are aware of this. Yet, we are troubled by it. I mean HOW MUCH FAITH IS FAITH. HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED. Jesus talked about "little faith and great faith." Where do we stand on the scale.

Matthew chapter 17 verse 14.....(Read Vs 14-21)

Have you ever seen a mustered seed? It is a tiny little thing. I was shown a mustered seed, once, and I said, "Boy, this is a little seed." And the man who gave me the seed said, Well, that really isn't the mustered seed.

I said, It isn't. You just gave it to me. And then he took it back from me and broke it open. In side were hundreds of tiny, tiny little seeds.

And it dawned on me. How little faith we have. It wasn't to bad

looking at that bigger seed. But, all those tiny, tiny seeds. They were really hundreds of little specks.

Jesus said, "If you just had a little speck of faith, you could say to a mountain, be removed.

What does that mean? It means that you and I have very little faith. The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God. And he who comes to Him must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Why don't we see God work in miraculous deeds and great power and in mighty deeds. That is what He says.

Turn over to chapter 21. A parallel story. Chapter 21 verse 18.

(Read Vs 18-20)

That is amazing. Don't tell me there isn't humor in the Bible. I can hardly read that without laughing. Here they are with the son of God. They have seen unbelievable miracles. And all he says to the tree is don't grow anymore figs...And the tree withered.

And the disciples say, "WOW! how did that happen?

You know, you talk about idiots...

But, the truth is that you and I would have done the same thing.

How did that happen? And Jesus answered them in Vs 21 "Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, be taken up and

cast into the sea, it shall happen. And everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.

We have already looked at the guid lines to that..asking in the name of the Lord and according to his will and so forth. Now, providing that that is all true, let's confront ourselves. DO WE BELIEVE?

YES, prayer is a problem when you lack faith. It is like praying for rain and not getting an umbrella.

(2) Turn to Matthew chapter 6. In addition to the fact that prayer can be a problem when those things exist, I want to, also, say in the second point that prayer is a privelege that should be cultivated in the private life of the believer. HOW SHALL WE PRAY? And folks this is a point of contraversary among Christians. And it shouldn't be. But we are stating to the point and very clearly that prayer is a privelege to be cultivated in the private life of the believer.

Now, you don't have to take my word for it, but there is plenty of proof in the Bible, but I believe that the effectiveness of your prayer life is never seen in public. YOU WILL HAVE TO THINK THAT ONE THROUGH.

I believe in public prayer. And I believe that christians ought to get together to pray. And before we are done, today, you will see that.

But, I believe that where the real battle takes place, at least 36 years of preaching and teaching has shown me that, the real battle and the real

struggle is in the private place where no one knows. That is where the war is going on. That is where you find out about prayer.

There is a sense when you are praying with other Christians that you get comfort and support and encouragement by what they are saying. And that is good. But, when you are alone with God it is like you are really faced with yourself and what you think and what you don't think. No one else knows. And there is no one to impress.

In Matthew chapter 6, our Lord Jesus taught us to pray this way. In Vs 6 he said, "but you, when you pray go into your room. And when you have shut your door." The whole point of that is so that no one knows what you are doing. Pray to your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

So, the blessing that comes to a person's life, publically, is directly related to what goes on privately in prayer. When you pray do not use vain repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask him."

(Read Vs 9-15)

Dear friends, do you know what we are talking about here when we say HOW TO PRAY? The sad fact is that many Christians have never learned how to pray privately. We actually need a public group in order to make it happen. And there is our weakness. We all need to learn that our Father who

sees in secret will reward you openly. He wants to know what you are like when no one else knows what you are doing. Your character is what you are in the dark when no one knows. Your reputation is just what people think you are. WOW!

(3) Turn to Acts chapter 1. The third thing that I would like to share about prayer is that prayer can be a problem as we discussed, but it is also a privilege to be cultivated in the private life of the believer. But, number three, prayer was a priority when the church began. It was a priority. And I want you to see that.. In Acts chapter 1 please notice verse 12. Acts 1 verse 12. When the church began, prayer was a priority.

(Read Vs 12-14)

And Vs 15 says that there was 120 people. Just about the size of this church. They were there for 10 days. And the primary thing they were doing is praying.

In Acts chapter 2 verse 42, it says of the early church that "continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to WHAT?...Prayer." They continued in it. Prayer was a priority when the church began.

They prayed for wisdom when leaders were selected. Look at chapter 1, verse 23. They proposed two different guys to take the place of Judas: Joseph and Matthias. "And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these twos thou hast chosen to

occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place. And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbaered with the eleven apostles."

No, it wasn't Paul. It was Matthias. The Holy Spirit even agrees to that in Vs 14 of chapter 2. "But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven." So, Matthias is already counted in the group by the Holy Spirit in chapter 2 verse 14. They prayed for the selection of leaders.

Look at chapter 6, please, vs 3. Chapter 6 verse 3. Whenever we need a leader we ought to pray. ..(Read vs 5-7). They prayed when they selected leaders.

Acts chapter 13. Acts 13 verse 1...(Read Vs 1-4a)

This is the first missionary team. And it was born in prayer. When the church began they prayed for leader.

Acts chapter 14 during the first missionary journey as churches were established, we read in chapter 14 verse 23, "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

Elders were chosen..missionaries were chosen..disciples were chosen. When ever there was a need for leaders. what did they do? They prayed....Prayed for wisdom in selecting leaders.

Turn to chapter 4 of the book of Acts. Not only did the early church

pray for wisdom in the selection of leaders, they prayed for boldness in the midst of persecution.

Acts chapter 4 verse 23: Boldness in the midst of persecution. There is a man back in New York known as the "subway singer." His name is James Humphry. He comes from a whole family of lawyers. But, he got saved and decided that something else needed to be done besides legal work. He plays guitar and also the harmonica. And he hooks the harmonica around his neck then plays the guitar. That way he plays both instruments at the same time. He also sings and writes his own music. I am told that he is well know throughout the subway system in New York. The New York subway is where you find a lot of violence. Grand central station, Time square, you name it. He sings and preaches up a storm and tells people about Jesus. He has been doing it for years. I understand he is quite a man. But, you talk about persecution. Boy, he is constantly under the gun. And he was ask one time by a reporter: WHAT DO YOU DO? He said..PRAY. The reporter ask, "well, what do you do if they take your guitar and destroy it? He said, I buy another one." Well, how do you handle all of that? I just pray. That is all. Just pray. The guys life is constantly in danger. And he handles it by praying. And he does this because he said, "the people need the Lord." And someone needs to share the love of Jesus with this folks. And in the articule that I read about this man this statement really caught my eye. He said, God has not given us a spirit of free, but of power and love and a sound mind.

The most important thing that I need is prayer. Hay! That comes out of the early church in Acts 4:23...(Read Vs 23-31)

And all of God's people said....AMEN!

Are you scared about something? The early church knew what to do. They prayed.

Turn to Acts chapter 12. Prayer was a priority when the church began. They prayed for wisdom in selecting leaders. They prayed for boldness in the midst of persecution. And they also prayed for protection and deliverance when they got into trouble.

Acts chapter 12 verse 5 says "So Peter was kept in prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God."

The church.....The Church.

Now, look at what happens. Peter gets out of prison. Let's start reading at Vs 12...(Read Vs 12-16)

Have you ever been amazed that God answered your prayer? That has happened to me many times. You pray for something and God answers your prayer and you are amazed. It is kind of funny.

Hay look! The early church prayed, folks. Turn to Acts chapter 20. The Bible also says that they prayed for encouragement and support. This is really a wonderful passage. In Acts 20 verse 36 Paul with the elders of the church of Ephesus are meeting together. And I like this passage. You talk about the sweetness of relationships..Peer group friends..and prayer. I read

this and my heart is blessed. I hope it blesses you.

Acts 20 verse 36...(Read Vs 36-38)

I tell you, I read this, and I am impressed with the relationship Paul had with those elders from the church in Ephesus. It is a relationship that seems to have been lost in the church of today. The love that was there. They knelt down and prayed. God encouraged Paul's heart.

Turn to chapter 21 and look at verse 3. ..(READ VS 3-5)

Isn't that wonderful? The early church prayed. They were encouraging and supporting in difficult times. They knelt down and they prayed.

Turn to chapter 27. They also prayed for food. And we will write it up with this one. Acts chapter 27. They prayed for food. Interesting story here. Paul is shipped wrecked, The Bible says..in Vs 35..(read Vs 35-36)

They thanked God for food. I have been ask many times if there is any place in the Bible where they thanked God for food? Oh, yes..

Turn to I Timothy chapter 4 and look at verses 3 to 5..I Timothy 4 verses 3 to 5.....(read Vs 3-5)

So, the early church had a priority of prayer. WHAT DID THEY PRAY FOR? They prayed for wisdom in selecting leaders. They prayed for boldness in the midst of persecution. They prayed for protection and deliverance. They prayed for encouragement and support. And they even prayed for

food. What an example.

(4) Number four and finally in our list. Prayer is not only a problem when those four areas that we mentioned earlier exist. But prayer is a privilege to be cultivated in the private life of the believer. And it was a priority when the early church began. But, 4th, it is to be a practice in which church should continually engage themselves.

Turn to Romans chapter 15. Does the Bible teach that churches as a cooperate group should engage themselves in regular prayer? And I think that there is no question about it.

In Romans 15 Paul says to the Romans in Vs 30..(read Vs 30-32)

Group Prayer? Yes! "strive together with me in your prayers to God."

Should Christians get together in groups and pray? YES!

In I Corinthians 11 verse 3.....(Read Vs 3-5).

The whole point that I am making here is in the church of Corinth we have people praying in public.

In Ephesians chapter 6 Paul wrote to the church of Ephesus and he said in Vs 18 "with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit for all the saints."

Listen, dear friends, Churches as groups are to pray.

Philippians 1:19 Paul said, "For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your (the word "your" in plural) through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

In chapter 4 of Philippians verse 6 it says "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your... (again it is plural not singular) let your requests be made known to God."

You say, "Why are you emphasizing this?" Because there are plenty of Christians who believe that a church should not give itself to cooperate public praying. But that position is not supported in the Bible. The Bible teaches that Churches should pray.

In Colossians 4 verse 2 and 3 we read "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us." This is using the plural form not the singular. He is not asking one individual to pray for him. He is asking a group, a whole church to pray for him. You find this over and over again.

Why am I pointing this out?

You know, I believe our church believes in prayer. I really do. But it is so easy to forget the great need of the body of Christ to pray as the body of Christ. To be the people of God means the people of God are praying together. We need to hear one another pray. We need to be encouraged by the prayers of others. The Bible teaches that we should all pray. I hope you all pray in private. That is where you need to learn to pray. But, we also need to learn to pray as a group.

I believe in prayer. I know you believe in prayer. And the great need

of the church, today, is for believers to pray. We need to pray as we have never prayed before. And this should happen not only in our worship service. But whenever we meet. Whether it is Board meeting or a Sunday School class meeting or whatever. When ever we gather, we should pray.

Let's Close with a word of prayer