

"The Blessings of Prayer"

God has given us a privilege and blessing that we must never overlook. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're looking at the privilege and blessing of prayer to our Father in heaven.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The Scriptures teach us what God wants us to know. And prayer allows us to approach the Father in heaven with our thoughts, our thanksgiving, our petitions, and our requests for forgiveness. As Christians we have no greater privilege than to have this twofold means of communication with our Father in heaven. And thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and we want to be a part of your life each week.

We'll never experience the beauty, power, and love found in prayer, unless we begin praying. We must never be self-righteous or rote in our prayers; they must come from our hearts and souls. Prayer helps us understand our Father in heaven, who we are, and Whose we are. When we kneel in prayer, we exalt our God. Prayer is based on God's love for believers. And through His grace, God gives them more things than they deserve, while through His mercy He shields them from those things which they do deserve. God keeps His promises and God hears our prayers.

In his book, "Continuing Instant in Prayer", Mack Lyon quoted an anonymous author who said, "Souls may be lost in good works, as surely as in evil ways. The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray." Our brother Mack understood that "The person who says he believes in prayer but thinks that what can be achieved by prayer can also be achieved without it, really doesn't believe in prayer." You have the opportunity today to approach the Creator of the Universe in prayer with the requests of your heart. What a blessing we have in prayer!

Now this is an important study on the blessings of prayer; and we offer it free! And if you'd like a printed copy and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have free materials on our website at www.searchtv.org. And you can also see us on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song, read from Luke 18:1 to 8, and explore the blessings of prayer.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Luke, chapter 18, verses 1 through 8. And here Jesus tells us the importance of keeping on in our prayer. "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, 'In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I'll give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she'll wear me out.' And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?'" We have the great privilege of prayer.

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful that we can come to You in prayer, that we can show You our love and tell You what a great God You are, and ask for Your forgiveness. And Father we pray

that You will keep our prayers in Your heart, and grant us the things that we request. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.”

When we start counting the blessings we enjoy through the love and grace of God, we should never overlook the privilege of prayer. Prayer gives us multiple blessings that encourage our hearts and remind us of the need to remain faithful to God and to serve Him. What are some of these blessings?

Well first, prayer allows us to draw close to God. Prayer brings us into the very presence of God. Paul described his prayer, “I bow my knees before the Father” (Ephesians 3:14). And when we pray to the Father in heaven, we approach Him with our hearts and lips. As His children, God grants us the privilege of prayer. He’s available to us every hour of every day. And He expects us to come into His presence. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:2 to 3, that “We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.”

Prayer is a conversation with our Father in heaven. Mack Lyon said, “It’s an invisible, supernatural line of communication between the creature and the Creator.” God, who is the father of spirits (Hebrews 12 verse 9), is very connected to our spirits and He knows our hearts and our thoughts. He wants not merely to be included in our lives but to be in the center of our hearts and lives. The Lord Jesus said the foremost commandment of God is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22 verse 37). Well how can we love God to that extent, if we fail to talk with Him from our hearts. Prayer is one means by which we show our love God.

Second, prayer is essential to help us in our spiritual growth. Growing in faith and love towards God and man is essential to the Christian life. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 12 and verse 30, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” Well how can we say we love and believe in God, if we never pray. God expects every Christian to grow spiritually, and that growth is dependent upon a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord Jesus. Prayer is a big part of that relationship. God said in Isaiah 41:10, “Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

When we pray, we are hungering and thirsting for God Himself. “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42 verses 1 and 2). In all our fears and anxieties, we realize our dependence on God. God is the ultimate provider of every human need and every good thing. Yes, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1 verse 17). Now we pray for our physical needs, but God is also conscious of our emotional and spiritual needs. Because He’s concerned for our well-being, God allows His children to have immediate fellowship with Him at every moment.

Third, prayer is essential to guard against the schemes of the devil. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6 and verse 13). While we strive to live godly lives in an ungodly world, prayer reassures us that we aren’t fighting this battle for our souls alone. God is with us! Jesus told the apostles at the Garden of Gethsemane, “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26 and verse 41). Watching and praying means that we’re preparing for the devil’s temptations.

Ephesians 6 verses 10 to 13 says, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. And therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

We’re in a spiritual war and we need to put on the full armor of God. We shouldn’t suppose that we can fight the devil for our souls apart from the strength that the Lord provides. If we fight the devil on our own, we’ll surely lose. We must give it our all and rely on the strength the Lord provides as well. The devil is never stronger than you when you have the strength of the Lord. The Lord wants us to wear the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the gospel of peace as shoes. He urges us to take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6 verses 14 to 18). And to this Paul adds: “Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end (He says), keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6 and verse 18).

Now in another passage, Paul prayed that God would strengthen the Christians at Ephesus in the inner man (Ephesians 3:14 to 16). You see, Paul wanted Christ to dwell in their hearts by faith (Ephesians 3:17). Our war against the devil is indeed spiritual. And the closer we draw to the Lord Jesus, the better prepared we are to fight and win. We fight the good fight of faith and love. And Paul urged Timothy, “But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. And take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6 verses 11 to 12). Again he says, “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2 verse 22).

Now God’s grace can help us transform our lives, and prayer helps us to call for God’s help. Titus 2:11 to 14 says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, (that is) the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

Even the most devout Christian, scheduling time for prayer will be a battle. Distractions, problems, and the cares of the world can crowd out prayer time. And unless we make time for God, we’ll not have enough time for God. We all face stress, anxieties, and burdens that weigh on our spirits. We wish we had someone to listen to us and to care. And the inspired apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:7 to 11, “Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brethren throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:7 to 11).

God can help us through the greatest struggles. I love God’s promise found in Isaiah 65:24 “Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.” God will hear you; and you can count on Him, because He loves and cares for you.

Fourth, we ask God as Christians to forgive our sins. When we're baptized into Christ, the Lord forgives our sins for the first time. Christians, however, find that they sin after being baptized and becoming a Christian and wonder how sins are forgiven after they are baptized into Christ. God's prepared a way, that is for Christians who have sinned to find forgiveness. They can confess their sins and pray for forgiveness. James 5 and verse 16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

Yes, praying for forgiveness means being honest with God, and the wrongs you've committed. God loves His children and wants to forgive us when we humbly and penitently come to Him for forgiveness. 1 John 1 and verse 9, says that "If we confess our sins, that He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Now God is faithful to keep His promises, and one of His promises to Christians can be found in Hebrews 8 and verse 12, "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." God is just, or righteous, and He will do the right thing. When we confess our sins and penitently ask God's forgiveness, we can be assured that God will keep His promise to forgive us. He'll cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Now when God forgives, He forgives all our sins, every single one of them.

God's gracious forgiveness and the Lord's sacrifice on the cross leads us to understand clearly just how much God loves us and wants us to spend eternity in heaven and with His children, and as His children. Now, such love motivates us to live righteously and Godly lives. Forgiveness brings us peace with God, a clean conscience, and relief from the wrath of God. Forgiveness of sins moves us to avoid temptation and sin. You know it's hard to pray one moment and sin the next, it's hard to approach the throne of grace and give in to the devil's temptations.

Our forgiveness from God also leads us to be gracious to others. If the Lord God could forgive us of great sin, we can forgive others for the sins they commit against us. Since God grants us peace in His forgiveness, we can grant peace to those who mistreat us. Colossians 3:12 to 13 says, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

Fifth, prayer offers the blessing of being thankful. The happiest people in the world are those who count their blessings regularly and give thanks. James 1:17 says, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." The joy and hope that we possess in Christ Jesus should remind us how very blessed we are. Christians have the forgiveness of sins, have God as their Father, and have the hope of eternal life in heaven. Counting our blessings helps us to see the ongoing love of God in our lives; giving thanks is one means by which we show our appreciation and love to God. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because He first loved us."

Let's pray together. "Heavenly Father, we are so grateful for all the good that You have done for us. We're thankful for the forgiveness of sins, we're thankful for life in Christ, we're thankful for the hope of heaven, we're thankful for good brethren. And Father we pray that You'll help us to do Your will always. In Jesus name, Amen."

When should we pray? Well the Scriptures are clear: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5 and verse 17). Now the Lord Jesus "told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Colossians 4:2 says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." And in Acts 2:42 shows the example of the earliest Christians in

Jerusalem: "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Now Paul reminds us in Ephesians 5 and verse 20, "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."

Pray before you get up in the morning and before you sleep at night. Pray before you eat and thank God for all He provides. Pray for comfort when you hurt, strength when you're weak, and forgiveness when you sin. Pray for a heart willing to forgive others as God forgave you. Pray for wisdom when you don't know what to do (James 1 verse 5). Pray for those who are sick and those who grieve. Pray when you face difficulties, worries, or fears. Pray for family and friends. Pray for the authorities and for our nation. Pray for our enemies. You can take every hurt and concern to the Father in heaven, because He cares.

God wants to see you saved and see you know the truth. To do just that, you must believe with all your heart Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, you must repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ, and be baptized into Christ, immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Why not do this today?

We pray that today's study about the blessings of prayer has helped you to see God's concern for you. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area at www.searchtv.org. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." And be sure to like the programs you watch; this helps spread the program. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

So focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. And I realize some of you for health reasons cannot attend worship; I'm speaking to those who can attend and haven't been. There's probably a church of Christ near you. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.