

Practical Religion
LESSON 4: PRAYER

And [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1)

Introduction: “The first act of faith will be to speak to God. Faith is to the soul what life is to the body. Prayer is to faith what breath is to life” (Ryle, p. 63).

I. Prayer is essential for salvation. (cf. Pr. 3:6; Ja. 1:5; 4:2)

- a. While nobody will be saved *by* prayers, nobody can be saved *without* prayer either.
- b. Blind Bartimaeus never read a Bible. The thief on the cross never heard a single sermon. Yet these men were saved—how? Because they *asked* for salvation.

II. No religious duty is so neglected as private prayer.

- a. Prayer is not natural to us, because the natural man is at war with God. The heart desires to get *as far away from God as possible*, even as Adam hid in the garden.
- b. Neglect of prayer is one great cause of backsliding (Mk. 14:38).
 - i. Peter had a true confession, true faith, but at Jesus’ trial, he denied him. If we neglect prayer, when the hour of temptation comes, our strength is gone, and we fall.
 - ii. Backsliding is no easier when we neglect to keep our hearts fixed on our Prince of Peace (Is. 26:3).

III. A habit of prayer is one of the surest marks of a true Christian.

- a. Scripture identifies *saints* as people who pray (Lk. 18:7; 1 Co. 1:2).
- b. Conversely, it is a mark of the *wicked* that they do not call upon the Lord (Ps. 14:4).
 - i. The simplest, weakest prayer is worth all the best convictions, feelings, and intentions put together.
- c. Diligence in prayer is the secret of eminent holiness (1 Ti. 2:8; Ps. 28:2).
 - i. Have we little conviction of our sins? Little love of God? Little joy in salvation? Prayerlessness may be *a* if not *the* leading cause of this spiritual stuntedness.

IV. God gives us great encouragement to pray.

- a. There is a *way*. Jesus Christ has opened the way to God, and God since always hears him, he will surely hear you when you pray in Jesus’ name (Jn. 11:41, 42; Ja. 5:16).
- b. There is an *advocate*. The Holy Spirit’s special office is to assist us in our approach to God (Ro. 8:26).
- c. There are great *promises* (Lk. 11:5-13).
- d. There are many *examples* (Ex. 14:15; Josh. 10:12; 1 Ki. 17:21; 18:36-38; Is. 37:21).
- e. Thus, prayer affords great returns of comfort, happiness, and contentment (Ja. 5:13; Ps. 55:22).

V. Personal Application

- a. Prayer is God’s provision to you against the day of trial.
- b. There is a friend ever waiting to help us, if we will only unburden our sorrows to him.
- c. If you *do not pray*, you have only to learn of the beggar to hold open empty hands and plead for bread. You have only to learn of Nehemiah, who prayed in a moment between breath for God’s help. You cannot do better than to ask the Lord for the gift of faith.
- d. If you *really desire salvation*, go to Christ. (Lk. 5:32). Your words may be feeble. It might not sound very holy. You may stutter and stammer. Go to him, in the earnest of your soul and the pleadings of your heart. Don’t despair when doesn’t answer immediately. He will answer.
- e. If you *want to press on with strength*, to be zealous for good deeds *yet* unwearied in well-doing, (Ti. 2:14; Ga. 6:9), then join the Beloved Christ in the desolate place and *pray*.