

Discipleship

Discipleship and Prayer

Lesson #3 for January 18, 2014

Scriptures: Daniel 9:2-19; Matthew 14:22-23; 26:36; John 17:6-26; Hebrews 2:17; 1 Peter 4:7.

1. What is the role of prayer in the life of a Christian? We would not pray if we did not believe in God. So, what do we expect to happen when we pray? Does prayer change God? Should it? Does prayer change us? How? What is the relationship between prayer and discipleship? When he gets up in the morning, should every Christian pray that God will give him an opportunity to witness for the truth? What would happen if we did? Would He say, "Yes"?

Let the workers grasp the promises of God, saying, "Thou hast promised, 'Ask, and ye shall receive.' I must have this soul converted to Jesus Christ." Solicit prayer for the souls for whom you labor; present them before the church as objects for the supplication. It will be just what the church needs, to have their minds called from their little, petty difficulties, to feel a great burden, a personal interest, for a soul that is ready to perish. Select another and still another soul, daily seeking guidance from God, laying everything before Him in earnest prayer, and working in divine wisdom.—Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, pp. 244, 245.

2. What is the main focus of your prayers? If you could line up 10 of your prayers and compare them, would they sound self-centered? Do we believe that God is some kind of divine Santa Claus? So, why do our prayers tend to be so self-centered? Do we worship in prayer?
3. What would happen if we intentionally began praying for other people? What if we prayed for the people to whom we should be witnessing? What if we actually prayed for our enemies?
4. There are a number of quite remarkable prayers in the Bible. One of them is found in Daniel 9:2-19. What was the focus of Daniel's prayer? Was Daniel's focus on God's reputation? How did Daniel learn of Jeremiah's prophecy?
5. First of all, notice that Daniel was not just praying for himself. In fact, by the time he offered that prayer, he was so elderly there was little chance that he would benefit from any of the things he was praying for! But, notice that when he talked about the sins of his people, he included himself.
6. However, the main focus of Daniel's prayer was concern for God's reputation. Have you ever prayed for God's reputation? In the Bible, when people were directly attacking God's reputation, He acted. Do people praise God when they look at you? (Matthew 5:16) Or, do people swear at you behind your back? What really happens when you pray? Is it possible that the supreme Sovereign of the universe is paying attention to your feeble, perhaps selfish, prayers?
7. Read Matthew 14:22-23; 26:36; Mark 1:35-37; Luke 5:15-16; **6:12-13**. If you read these passages along with the parallel passages in *Desire of Ages*, you will get the impression that each night Jesus would go to a place where it was quiet and plan His next day in prayer with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Could we do that? Sometimes, like the night before appointing His 12 disciples, Jesus prayed all night. Why don't more Christians do that today? Don't we need prayer even more than Jesus did? Do we enjoy the time we spend in prayer with the Father? Do you think Jesus enjoyed the time He spent in conversation with the Father?
8. What is true Christian prayer? Christ prayed for His disciples and for us.

Through nature and revelation, through His providence, and by the influence of His Spirit, God speaks to us. But these are not enough; we need also to pour out our hearts to Him. In order to have spiritual life and energy, we must have actual intercourse with our heavenly Father. Our minds may be drawn out toward Him; we may meditate upon His works, His mercies, His blessings; but this is not, in the

fullest sense, communing with Him. **In order to commune with God, we must have something to say to Him concerning our actual life.**

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.1,2.

9. Jesus suggested some pretty amazing things about prayer. Is it really true that we could move mountains? (Matthew 17:20) And why don't we? Is it because we do not know how to pray? Is it because our faith is too shallow? Or, too small? Or, is it because there are not enough of us praying for the same thing? Luke 11:13 suggests that we know how to give good gifts to our children; so, surely, God would do an even better job giving gifts. Do we believe the words of Jesus in John 14:12-14 that we may be able to do even greater things than He did?
10. If we prayed more and had more faith, would there be more miracles? During the times in the Bible when there were more miracles—such as around the time of the exodus, in the times of Elijah and Elisha, and in the time of Jesus—they were times of minimal faith! Why don't we have more miracles today?
11. Prayer should be a kind of lifeline to heaven. It should help to cement our relationship with God. But, conversation is never just one way. How does God speak to us? Is it through the Bible? What does He want us to tell Him about? Of course, we know that God is already fully aware of everything we could possibly say to Him.
12. Read Matthew 6:7-8; 7:7-11; 18:19-20. God is not only suggesting that He will answer our prayers, but also that He will be with us when we gather together to pray and to worship.
13. When we pray and especially if we ask for some special favor, are we taking into account that the entire onlooking universe is watching? Do we recognize that God must answer prayers in light of the great controversy and what is best for all?
14. Following the example of Jesus, we are taught to pray that God's will be done. Do we always want that? How often do our prayers suggest that we want our will to be done? What if God's will is that we pray for our enemies? (Matthew 5:43-48) Do you think Jesus ever prayed for the Pharisees and Sadducees?
15. Read John 17:6-26. Clearly, Jesus not only prayed for Himself at that time of great danger, but also He prayed for His disciples at length and then prayed for us.
16. We all know about Peter's claims and subsequent denials. (Matthew 26:31-35; Luke 22:31-34; John 13:36-38; Matthew 26:69-75; Luke 22:56-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27) Jesus knew what was coming, but Peter did not. How many of us are deceived about our Christianity? How much experience have we had with intercessory prayer? It has been said, "People care little about what you know until they know how much you care."
17. To become like Jesus is the greatest praise that we can give to His name. Some have suggested that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." From the Internet:

This proverbial expression dates from the early 19th century, although versions of it that paraphrased the same thought existed well before then.

The first of these alternate versions is found in a biography of Marcus Aurelius by Jeremy Collier and André Dacier, titled *Emperor Marcus Antoninus his conversation with himself*, 1708:

You should consider that Imitation is the most acceptable part of Worship, and that the Gods had much rather Mankind should Resemble, than Flatter them.

A nearer stab at the current version comes in the English newspaper *The Spectator* in 1776, written by Joseph Addison and others, 1776:

Imitation is a kind of artless flattery.

The ... [fullest expression] as far as this proverb is concerned was given by Charles Caleb Colton, in *Lacon: or, Many things in few words*, 1820:

Imitation is the sincerest of flattery.

<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/imitation-is-the-sincerest-form-of-flattery.html> as of December 2, 2013.

18. The Bible instructs us to pray for many things. What do we know about the prayer experience of the disciples and friends in the upper room just before Pentecost?

The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship. They drew nearer and nearer to God, and as they did this they realized what a privilege had been theirs in being permitted to associate so closely with Christ. Sadness filled their hearts as they thought of how many times they had grieved Him by their slowness of comprehension, their failure to understand the lessons that, for their good, He was trying to teach them.

These days of preparation were days of deep heart searching. The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* 37.1,2.

19. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:16; Jude 20-22; 1 Peter 4:7. We need to talk to God about anything that concerns us. And we need to do it in the name of Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts gives us examples of the church praying for Paul and Barnabas when they set out on their missionary journeys. (Acts 13:3; 14:23; Compare Acts 20:36; 21:5.)
20. Have you made a conscious effort to practice intercessory prayer? Some years ago, there was a movement among Adventists suggesting that if enough people got together and prayed for something, it would have to happen. Is that true?
21. What do you think would happen if we prayed more intercessory prayer?
22. There are some Christians who think that prayer is virtually all there is to Christianity. Ellen White responded by saying:

He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine. When men take themselves out of social life, away from the sphere of Christian duty and cross bearing; when they cease to work earnestly for the Master, who worked earnestly for them, they lose the subject matter of prayer and have no incentive to devotion. Their prayers become personal and selfish. They cannot pray in regard to the wants of humanity or the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom, pleading for strength wherewith to work.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 101.

23. Would it stunt the church if we were to pray only for ourselves and not pray for others, thus focusing our entire attention upon ourselves? Absolutely! But, if we were actively involved in intercessory prayer picking one and then another person or group to pray for, how would that impact our attitudes toward them? If you pray for someone, does that encourage you to act on their behalf? Should we try to help fulfill our prayers for others?

24. Do your prayers take a conversational approach? How does God speak to you? Isn't God's main way of speaking to us through Bible study? Should prayer always be accompanied by Bible study? Should our prayers be carefully choreographed? Do we need to think through what we are going to say before we open our mouths and try to speak to God? Or, should we feel completely open when we talk to God? Doesn't He know everything about us already? Doesn't He know our innermost thoughts and motives? How difficult is it for you to give God the freedom of answering your prayers in the way He sees best? Do you sometimes feel like the person who prayed for patience and then said, "I need it right now!"?
25. Is personal prayer and communion with God an attempt to try to get God to think like we do? Or, is it our opportunity to learn to start thinking as God thinks?
26. Read Mark 1:35 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Do these verses mean that we should be always down on our knees in an attitude of prayer? One famous Christian, Brother Lawrence, said that "praying without ceasing" means "practicing the presence of God." Do we keep God in mind during all of our activities?
27. Remember that faith is a guiding hand for prayer. We should not pray in an effort to twist God's arm to get Him to do what we want Him to do. We should pray because God is our best Friend, and we want to talk to Him about whatever we are doing or whatever concerns us. Is that what prayer means to you?
28. Have you ever had the experience of praying for something and when it does not happen, hearing from a fellow Christian that you must not have had enough faith?
29. If we knew God well enough, would we stop asking for foolish things? Would we be able to know what things God wants us to ask for? Are there some things we can pray for that guarantee that God will say, "Yes"? If you recognized that the entire universe is watching you when you pray, would you be afraid to open your mouth?
30. Have you ever been to a service where they were discussing answers to prayer? And at such times, do the stories focus on times when God gave apparently miraculous responses to prayers? At such a service, would you dare to stand up and tell about an experience when you prayed for something and it did not happen?
31. Be very honest now. Would you rather have a God that could be persuaded to do what you want Him to do? Or, an all-knowing, all-powerful God who does what is best for you even if it is not what you think you want at that moment?
32. What is your favorite prayer in the Bible? Do you perhaps have a favorite Bible character who prayed but his prayer was not recorded? What do those words or that story say to you? What do they teach you about God?
33. Abraham and Moses had interesting conversations with God? (See Genesis 18:16-33; Exodus 32:7-14; 31-35; Numbers 14:13-19) Could those conversations be considered prayer? In prayer, would you dare to argue with God? Would you dare to suggest that He should do what is right?
34. Clearly, God precipitated those conversations. He knew in advance what Abraham and Moses would do and say. Was that experience an attempt to prove to the Devil and to the onlooking universe that God still had some real friends on this earth? Will God do something like that again at the end of this earth's history with the 144,000? Would you be willing to be a Moses or an Abraham at that time? Or, would your prayers tend to be more selfish?

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