

# THE RED LETTER LECTURES

## LEARNING TO PRAY FROM THE WORDS OF JESUS

### How To Pray

I. **And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. — Mt. 6:5-8**

#### A. **Do not be like the hypocrites . . .**

1. An Imperative Command. *See Margin.*
2. A hypocrite is one who acts pretentiously, a counterfeit, a person who assumes and speaks or acts under a feigned character.<sup>4</sup>
3. Actors on a stage were called hyprocrites. Why?

#### B. **Go into your room . . . and pray to your Father . . .**

1. *Go* and *pray* are also Imperative Commands.
2. Does this preclude public prayers?
3. Your best prayers will be those done in secret — with just you and God. *See Psm. 91: 1-4.*

## NOTES

Prayer Quote: "Our ability to stay with God in our closet measures our ability to stay with God out of the closet." — E.M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*.

#### Imperative Command

A verb form that expresses action which is to be realized by the exercise of the will of one person upon that of another. (*Summers, Essentials of New Testament Greek, p. 112*). In this case, the expressed will of Jesus upon ours.

<sup>4</sup> Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament*, p. 1424

Psm. 91: 1-4: He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler And from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.

C. ***Do not keep on babbling . . .***

1. An Imperative Command.
2. His point is that disciples should avoid meaningless, repetitive prayers offered under the misconception that mere length will make prayers effective. Can you relate?
3. It is not the length of prayer but the strength of prayer that prevails with God. <sup>5</sup>
4. Jesus often prayed all night and even repeated His prayers. *See Mt. 26: 39, 42, 44.*

D. ***Do not be like them . . . your Father knows . . .***

1. An Imperative Command.
2. God already knows what you need. Then why pray and ask for what we need?

E. Paraphrase of Mt. 6:5-8 from *The Message*:

*And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace. The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need.*

## NOTES

<sup>5</sup> Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary, p. 1151

Mt. 26: 39, 42, 44: Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." . . . He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." . . . So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

**II. This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. — Mt. 6:9-13**

**A. *You should pray . . .***

1. Lit., "you be praying." An Imperative Command.
2. Notice how short the "Our Father" prayer is and yet how much it covers.
3. The prayer is composed of six requests. The first three ask for God's kingdom to come, the last three are for God to meet the needs of His<sub>6</sub> people until His kingdom comes.

**B. *Our Father . . .***

1. Israel was slow to understand the possibility of a personal relationship with God as their heavenly Father.
2. In all of the OT, only in Isaiah is this truth presented. *See Isa. 63:16, 64:8.*
3. This is why the Jews were so upset at Jesus for claiming that relationship with God. *See Jn. 5:18.*
4. The Jews of today still have the same problem.

**C. *in heaven . . .***

1. His location or domain.
2. Not limited to this world.

## NOTES

Prayer Quote: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go" — William Shakespeare, *Hamlet Act III, Sc. 3*

<sup>6</sup>Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary, p. 1151

Isa. 63:16: But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

Isa. 64:8: Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Jn. 5:18: For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

D. **Hallowed be your name . . .**

1. Lit., "Let your name be sanctified," or "set apart."
2. This is an Imperative Command.

E. **Your kingdom come . . .**

1. God's perfect will is always being done in heaven. We are instructed to ask for the same to be done on the earth.
2. When we ask for His perfect will on the earth, God expects us to be willing to be a part of that answer, e.g., "obedience."
3. Jesus came to display God's perfect will on the earth. *See Jn. 6:38.*
4. Jesus always deferred to the Father's will. *See Lk. 22:42.*

F. **Give us today our daily bread . . .**

1. Lit., "give us today the bread for today."
2. Notice the emphasis on enough food for today only. This is reminiscent of the daily manna in the wilderness. *See Num. 11:9.*

G. **forgive us . . . as we also have forgiven . .**

1. Forgiveness asked is forgiveness given but is there a condition to this request?
2. Forgiving others is key to God forgiving us. It is key to all of our relationships both within and without the body of Christ. *See Col. 3:13.*
3. Jesus modeled forgiveness like no other. *See Lk. 23:24.*

## NOTES

Jn. 6:38: For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

Lk. 22:42: Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.

Num. 11:9: When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down.

Col. 3:13: Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Lk. 23:24: Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

4. Question: If we do not forgive others, will God forgive us? See *Mt. 6: 14-15*

H. ***lead us not . . . but deliver us . . . evil . . .***

1. God never tempts us to do evil.  
See *Jas. 1:13-14*.
2. This is a plea for God's help with our daily struggle with the temptation to sin.
3. Lit., "the evil one." Speaking of the devil.
4. The "Our Father" is the most recited prayer in all of Christian history. Sadly, it is often recited in rote by many.
5. Teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus adopted a fairly common Jewish prayer called the *Kaddish*, which was prayed regularly in the synagogues and included the lines, "Exalted and hallowed be His great name . . . and may He cause His kingdom to rule."<sup>7</sup>

I. Paraphrase of *Mt. 6:9-13* from *The Message*:

*With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this: Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are. Set the world right; Do what's best— as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.*

III. Questions for further study:

- A. Has this session changed your understanding of how to pray?
- B. Do you have a place to pray that is set apart for just you and God?
- C. If you prayed nothing else, would the "Our Father" be sufficient? Why or why not?

## NOTES

Mt. 6:14-15: For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Jas. 1:13-14: When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary, p. 1151.