

Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. A teacher will teach from the Bible that a disciple of Jesus prays. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

Jesus says, “Ask and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7). Paul says, “Pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). And James says, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). The Bible teaches much about prayer. The first series of 4 teachings is about “The teachings of Jesus on prayer”. The topics are “the Lord’s Prayer” in two parts and “The other teachings of Jesus on prayer” in two parts.

Today’s teaching is: A DISCIPLE LEARNS FROM THE PRAYERS OF JESUS - PART 1. We will study what Jesus Christ taught about prayer and include his own example. As you listen, make notes.

Jesus Christ is the Messiah of the world. When he finally arrived in Israel, the Jews had already established traditional ways of praying. The temple stood in Jerusalem and was regarded as the most important place of prayer. Especially the teachers of the law and Pharisees loved to pray in public and let everyone know when they were fasting, so that people would admire their piety. The teachings of Jesus about prayer were very different. Last week we studied the first 5 differences between what Jesus Christ taught about prayer and what the Pharisees taught. The first difference was prayer in the Spirit. The second difference was prayer in the truth. The third difference was prayer in secret. The fourth difference was prayer of agreement. And the fifth difference was prayer of faith. Today we will discover again that what Jesus taught about prayer is very different than human traditions about prayer!

POINT 6. PRAYER OF STRUGGLE AND REST

First. Jesus Christ taught us the prayer of surrender by his example in Gethsemane.

It was the night before Jesus was crucified. In Luke 22:39-46 we read how Jesus struggled in prayer. He prayed and said, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” The cup given to Jesus to drink was his coming suffering and death on the cross for the sins of mankind. Thinking about this coming suffering, Jesus became sorrowful and troubled (Matthew 26:37) and prayed in anguish to the extent that even his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Although Jesus was God who also took on the human nature, he prayed through his tears and did not receive what he asked! In his human nature, Jesus himself experienced the burden of unanswered prayer.

Although Paul was an apostle of Christ, he prayed three times asking God to remove the thorn in his flesh, which tormented him. God’s answer to him was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Like Jesus Christ and Paul, we too experience struggles in our prayers. We often pray for things without receiving what we ask for. The words, “Yet not my will, but yours be done” is not a prayer of *resignation*, but rather a prayer of *surrender* (relinquishment). We do not give up, but work together with God to determine the outcome of events. *We let go of our own will in order to receive God’s will*. We frequently hold on so tightly to the good we do know that we cannot receive the greater good we do not know. Letting go of our own will brings freedom from the “self-sins”, like self-sufficiency, self-complacency, self-satisfaction, self-centredness, self-abuse, self-hatred, self-depreciation, self-deception, self-indulgence, self-destruction, etc. Letting go of our own will brings freedom to care for others. The crucifixion of our own will brings the resurrection of God’s will. God is not destroying our will, but transforming it, so that more and more we can freely will what God wills.

Second. But Jesus Christ also taught us the prayer of rest.

In Matthew 11:28-30 he said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” “Coming to Jesus” means, to believe in him like little children and to come to him in prayer with our struggles. When we are physically tired of hard work or spiritually tired in our ministry or emotionally tired of struggling in our prayers, then we should stop and rest. When we are burdened by our efforts to keep the law or by our efforts to pray and work hard for Christ, then we should stop and rest. How do we find rest? Jesus invites us to take up his yoke and learn from him. “The yoke of Jesus” means the teachings of Jesus, especially the teaching that we are saved by simple trust in Jesus and not by the works of the law or our hard efforts. We please God not by our efforts and struggles, but by resting in his completed work of salvation. So the prayer of rest is a prayer of dropping our burdens at the feet of the cross where we can find complete rest and joy in his completed work.

POINT 7. PRAYER OF PERSISTENCE

Jesus Christ taught us to pray with persistence.

In Luke 11:5-8 he told the following parable, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'" Then the one inside answers, "Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything." I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

You and I are like the friend at midnight. Unexpectedly, a needy friend appears at your door. He is tired from a journey he has been making and he is hungry. He expects hospitality, food and a place to sleep. But you did not expect guests and so you have no food in the house. In your great predicament, you go to the house of a rich friend of yours and ask him to lend you three loaves of bread. The rich friend, of course, is God!

In this parable Jesus Christ teaches us to pray persistently for other people. He teaches that intercessory prayer consists of the following parts. One, you realise the need of your needy friend. Two, you love your needy friend by going out to find help. Three, you are conscious that you cannot really meet his need. Four, you believe that your rich friend, God, can help. Five, you have the courage and boldness to persevere in asking your rich friend for help in spite of the difficulties. Six, you are certain that your rich friend will help.

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus tells another parable to show us that we should always pray and not give up. If an evil judge can be persuaded to act by the persistence of a weak widow, how much more can God be persuaded by to act by the persistent prayers of his own people? We should practise persistence in our prayers.

The Lord Jesus Christ regarded persistent prayer so important for us to learn, that he told two parables about it. In both parables he let us know that prayer would not be easy and that we must expect difficulties, which could only be conquered by persistent and determined perseverance in prayer!

In the parables, Christ presented the difficulty as being on the side of the unwilling rich friend and the unjust judge. However, in our prayers to God, the difficulty is rather on our side, not God's side. God is more willing to give good things to those who ask him than any earthly father is willing to give bread to his child. God will act more quickly to do justice to Christians than the unjust judge in the parable. He will act more quickly than the reluctant friend in the parable. Persistent prayer is not needed to make God willing to act, but is needed to train us in faith and perseverance. Jesus Christ could not find any earthly illustration of a loving father or a willing friend in order to teach us the lesson of persistent prayer. Therefore he used the illustration of the unwilling friend and the unjust judge to encourage us to have that kind of faith that believes that perseverance can overcome every obstacle.

First. Sin makes it difficult to persist in prayer.

In Isaiah 59:2 is written, "Your sins have hidden God's face from you, so that he will not hear." The difficulty is on our side. We are sinful and we lack spiritual willingness to persevere. But at the same time our difficulty in praying becomes God's difficulty in answering as well. His wisdom, his righteousness and love, does not dare give to us what would harm us, if we received it too soon or too easily. The sin in our own lives and the consequences of such sins is what makes it impossible for God to give at once. To break through the power of sin in our own lives or the sin in the lives of the people for whom we pray, is what makes the struggle of prayer such a reality.

Second. The evil spirits make it difficult to persist in prayer.

In Ephesians 6: 12 is written, "Our struggle is against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." There are difficulties to overcome in the heavenly realms as well. When we plead with God for the removal of these known and unknown obstacles, our persevering prayers will bring us into a state of brokenness and helplessness before God. Our surrender to God and wholehearted agreement with God's will as well as our growing faith to take hold of God's promises, will at the same time overcome the hindrances in us as well as the hindrances in heaven. *As God conquers us, we conquer in our prayers. As God gains the victory over us, we gain victories in prayer.*

Third. Not believing God's promises makes it difficult to persist in prayer.

In Luke 11:9-13 Jesus promises, "So I tell you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" In Matthew 7:11 Jesus promises, "How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" When we fulfil the conditions for prayer, then God promises to fulfil the promises about prayer. Everyone who asks, receives; everyone who seeks, finds; everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. God promises that not a single Christian will be disappointed. If even earthly fathers, who are sinful and weak by nature, provide their children only with good things and with nothing that

will harm them, how much more will our heavenly Father provide us with the Holy Spirit, who is the source of every good gift on earth.

POINT 8. PRAYER OF WATCHFULNESS

Jesus Christ taught us to pray as an expression of being watchful.

In Mark 14:38 he said, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall onto temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” At times of struggle, we must keep alert against the temptation to become untrue to Jesus. Although our spirit is eager to do what is right, our human nature is frail and prone to temptations. Prayer in times of temptation or trial is like standing guard against the attacks of enemies. When the spiritual warfare is raging, then we must cultivate an attitude of watchfulness, knowing that the devil will especially use times of temptation and trial to attack us with his flaming darts.

POINT 9. PRAYER AND FASTING

Jesus Christ taught us to pray, but he does not require us to fast.

In Matthew 6:16-18 he taught, “When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Jesus speaks of the fast as an expression of humiliation. He condemned the act the Pharisees were putting up, when they covered their faces with ashes and wanted all people to notice their piety. Jesus does not command his disciples to fast. He also does not forbid them to fast. If they wanted to fast, they may, but then they should do it as inconspicuously as possible.

After the death of Jesus, things changed. Jesus not only *fulfilled* the law (Matthew 5:17), but also *cancelled and abolished* the requirements of the ceremonial law (Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:15). The ceremonial law included circumcision, sacrificing animals, bringing harvest offerings and tithes, *fasting* and eating only clean foods. Christ took all these requirements of the Old Testament ceremonial law away from Christians! They may never be reintroduced as religious requirements in the Christian church! Christians may fast if they like, but they may not require other Christians to fast.

POINT 10. PRAYER FOR OTHERS

Jesus Christ taught us to pray for others.

First. In Matthew 9:38 he said, “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest field.” Christ desires that we pray for more workers in God’s harvest.

Second. In John 17, Christ prays for himself as well as for his disciples. He prayed especially for their protection against the evil one, their sanctification by the word of God and for their unity with one another, so that the people of the world could see the reality of Christ.

Third. In Luke 22:31-32 he says, “Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Christ prayed for each one of his disciples by name, especially against the plots of Satan and against backsliding in the faith.

Fourth. In Luke 24:51, just before he was taken up into heaven, he blessed his disciples.

Fifth. In Luke 23:34 after being crucified by the mob, he prays, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” He prayed for those who persecuted and harmed him.

Sixth. In Luke 6:27-28 he taught, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” Christ taught us to pray for our enemies.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Choose one of these ways of praying that Jesus taught and practise to pray in this way to God.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and make disciples” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to “Discipleship training on the air”.