

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 fourth series of 8 teachings is about "**The practice of prayer**". The four topics are: "A disciple is motivated to pray", "A disciple is sensitive to the physical aspects of prayer", "A disciple persists in prayer" and "A disciple is convinced about the effects of prayer". Every topic will be in two parts. Today we will learn about "A DISCIPLE IS MOTIVATED TO PRAY - PART 1". In part 1 we will consider "the promises concerning prayer" and "the hindrances of prayer".

Christians often ask the following questions about prayer:

One. Why should we pray? What promises does God make concerning prayer?

Two. Which things hinder prayer?

We are going to look at many Bible passages that deal with these questions. Write the Bible references down so that you can read them again.

POINT 1. PROMISES CONCERNING PRAYER

There are four promises with regard to prayer.

One. God knows our needs and desires.

In Matthew 6:8-9 Jesus says, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." Why does God want us to pray, if he already knows what we need before we ask him? Parents on earth relate to their children in the same way. Children know that their parents know their needs the best of all people. That is precisely why they go to their own parents with their needs. And that is exactly what their parents want them to do! Earthly parents understand their own children thoroughly and know their needs better than any stranger. In a far superior way, God knows our needs and desires, which we bring to him in prayer. God wants us to pray, because prayer is on the one hand an expression of our total dependence on God and on the other hand a delightful way in which God relates to us. Therefore, because God knows your needs and cares about your needs, pray to God!

Two. God shows mercy and helps in times of need.

In Ephesians 2:18 is written that through Jesus Christ we have access to God the Father by the Holy Spirit. Christians *can really approach* God in prayer, because Christ opened the way to God and the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see this reality. When Christians pray, God acts! In Ephesians 3:12 is written, "In Jesus Christ and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." Christians may approach God in prayer *with freedom*, because Christ took away all their sin by dying on the cross. Their past sins no more block the way to God. And in Hebrews 4:15-16 is written that we have a high priest, Jesus Christ, who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses, because he has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Christians may approach God in prayer *with confidence*, because Jesus Christ really understands their weaknesses and struggles. When we have sinned, God promises to mercifully forgive our transgressions. And when we have needs, God promises to graciously help us just when we need it. Therefore, when we Christians pray, we may approach God with freedom and with confidence!

Three. God fulfils his promises.

In Jeremiah 33:3 God says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." God encourages his people to call to him when they need help. God promises to answer them not through *words*, but through *deeds*! These deeds are promised in Jeremiah chapters 30-33: God promises to answer his people with the following great deeds: God will break the yoke of foreign enslavement. He will draw them to himself with love, gather them and heal their wounds. He will lead them beside streams of water and on a level path where they will not stumble. He will watch over them like a shepherd, redeem from the hands of those stronger than them and comfort and satisfy them with abundance. In short, God will give them rest! He will forgive them and remember their sins no more. He will write his teachings on their minds and hearts. They will become like a well-watered garden! He will inspire them to fear God for their own good and for the good of their children. God will forgive their sin and rebellion against him, cleanse them and heal them. He will rebuild

them, restore their fortunes, let them enjoy peace and security and make them countless like the stars. These are the great things God will do. They are the fulfilment of God's covenant promises to his people throughout the Old Testament. These promises are not unknown, because God has made these promises to them again and again. What is *unsearchable and unknown* is not *what* God promises to do, but *how* God will fulfil these promises! What goes above the human mind to grasp is *how and when God will do these great things to them*. Because God will do these great and unsearchable things, we Christians must call to God!

Four. God acts on our prayers through the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew 7:7-11 we read, "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; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if the son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 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 good gifts to those who ask him!" In the parallel passage in Luke 11:13, Jesus promises, "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?" When we fulfil the *conditions* of asking, seeking and knocking, then 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!*

For example, in Acts 4, the apostles prayed together. The result was that the Holy Spirit filled them and they went out preaching the gospel boldly. In Acts 6, the apostles made it their priority to pray and to preach and teach the word of God. The result was that the word of God spread everywhere and that the number of disciples multiplied. In Acts 10, the apostle Peter prayed in a quiet place on the roof of his house. The result was that the Holy Spirit gave him a vision, showing him that God intended to include very many non-Jews into his Church and kingdom. Peter was invited to a Roman military officer's house and after preaching the gospel, this man and many of his family members and friends became followers of Jesus Christ. In Acts 12, the church prayed earnestly to God for Peter who was locked in prison. The result was that the prison walls, chains, gates and guards, even the whole Roman Empire as represented in king Herod was powerless to hinder the spread of the gospel in the face of a praying church! In Acts 13, the church leaders prayed. The result was that the Holy Spirit gave them new insight into God's plan to evangelise the world and they sent out their best workers to be a part of that plan. Wherever Christians pray today, there the Holy Spirit is at work!

POINT 2. HINDRANCES OF PRAYER

There are seven things that hinder prayer.

One. Prayerlessness hinders prayer. In James 4:2 is written, "You do not have because you do not ask God." Probably the greatest hindrance to prayer is not praying at all. A story is told that is not written in the Bible. The story speaks of a Christian who died. When he reached the gates of heaven, an angel showed him around heaven. At one place there were huge storerooms full of packages. All the packages were neatly wrapped and had a name and address written on it. Suddenly the man noticed that very many packages had his name and address written on it. He asked the angel what these packages were. The angel answered, "These packages are answers to prayers and many blessings of God. But because you did not ask, God did not send them!" God is our Father in heaven and desires to answer our prayers and bless us with all the blessings in heaven. Not asking and not praying is the greatest hindrance for God to bless us.

Two. Unconfessed sin hinders prayer. Sin hinders prayers. In Isaiah 1:13-15 God says to his people Israel, "Stop bringing meaningless offerings. Your incense is detestable. ... Your festivals my soul hates. ... When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen." And in Isaiah 29:13 God says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." Why will God not even listen to the prayers of his own people? Because in Isaiah 1:3-4 he says, "Israel is a sinful nation, ... a brood of evildoers, given to corruption. They have forsaken the Lord!" In Isaiah 59:1-2 he says the same thing, "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear to dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." Doing evil in any form hinders prayers! God is a holy God and he will simply refuse to listen to prayers when people live in sin. Examples of sin are spiritual corruption and economic corruption. Spiritual corruption is not knowing God personally, turning your back to God and refusing to listen when God speaks. Economic corruption is doing evil like receiving and giving bribes, evading to pay tax and revenue, extortion and industrial espionage, etc.

Psalm 66:18 says, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." God is a holy God and hates sin in all its forms. If we deliberately continue to sin, God will definitely turn his face away from us and not listen to our prayers. However, if we confess our sins, then he will forgive us, cleanse us and again listen to our prayers. In Proverbs 15:8 is written, "The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him." God detests the prayers of the wicked. If they pray, they pray to use God for their wicked schemes, but God will not listen to their prayers. God listens to the prayers of those whose sins are forgiven.

Three. Lawlessness hinders prayer. In Proverbs 28:9 is written, "If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable" God is thinking of his laws in the Bible. How could we expect God to listen to our prayers, when we refuse to listen to God's words in the Bible? Such prayers are insincere and detestable! This verse shows that what God says to us in the Bible and what we say to God in prayer are very closely connected. Disobedience to God's Word results in rejection of our prayers.

In 1 Peter 3:12, the apostle Peter says, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." Doing what is right in God's eyes, that is, doing what the Bible says, will be one of your greatest motivations to pray, because God promises that he will give you all his attention and listen to your prayers! James writes in James 5:16, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Living a righteous life shows to God that you take him seriously. And when God listens to your prayers, then he shows that he is taking you seriously! Living a righteous life, that is obeying the commands and teachings in the Bible, will make your prayers powerful and very effective!

Four. Doubt and double-mindedness hinders prayer. In James 1:6-8 is written, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." When we doubt, we do not believe that God speaks the truth and we do not trust that God will do what he promised. When we pray to God, but do not trust him, then we will receive nothing from him! One moment we believe we should ask God and the next moment we don't believe that God can be trusted. This makes us a person of two minds: a person of belief and unbelief at the same time.

Five. Wrong motives hinders prayer. In James 4:3 is written, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." Many people regard prayer as the way to get everything they want. But God is not a heavenly supermarket, where we can buy what our heart desires. God does not exist to fulfil *our desires*, but we are created and exist to fulfil *God's desires*! When we pray, we should pray in accordance with *God's will*, not *our will*. We are created to glorify God by serving him in his kingdom and by walking with him from day to day. God will not answer any prayer with wrong motives! God will not answer selfish prayers!

Six. Unforgiving spirit hinders prayer. In Mark 11:25 is written, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." The essence of our relationship with God is forgiveness of past sins, reconciliation of the broken relationship and loving friendship and service. God decreed that the essence of our relationship with one another should also be forgiveness, reconciliation and love. If we do not take our relationship with other people serious, then God will also not take our relationship with him serious. Bitterness in our heart against somebody, who wronged us, disqualifies us from receiving answers to our prayers.

Seven. Mercilessness hinders prayer. In Proverbs 21:13 is written, "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered." God created all people and he is especially concerned with the widow and orphan, the oppressed and the poor. The Bible says, "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done" (Proverbs 19:17). The way we treat the poor will also be the way God treats us when we are in need. If we show no mercy to the poor, then God will also not show mercy to us when we pray for his mercy.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Allow God to search your heart and life and show you what is hindering your prayers. Then stand on the promises of God and pray, no matter your personal weaknesses or circumstances.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and make disciples" and Internet on www. Etc

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