

A CALL TO PRAYER



J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

Course CTP

(complete)

Name: _____ Student ID: _____ Date: _____

Instructions for this course

The reading material for this course is *A Call to Prayer* by J. C. Ryle which is included in this study guide. All materials you need to take this course are included in this study guide, except for a Bible and answer sheets.

Before each lesson: pray for God to give a teachable heart and understanding. Begin the lesson by reading the related section in the book provided.

Answer the questions for the corresponding lesson in this study guide.

Use the required answer sheet format, putting your name and course information on each sheet (sample after the Table of Contents). Use any standard note paper (or the answer booklets if provided).

Skip a line between answers.

Always use your own words in your answers.

Try to be as clear and concise as possible.

Please do not rush! Meditate on what God wants you to learn.

Don't go to the next question until completing the current one.

If, and only if, you are taking the course as ***correspondence study*** (with written feedback from others):

After completing lessons 1 to 10, send the completed answer sheets to your course coordinator.

Only mail your answers sheets, not other materials.

All sent answers are handled confidentially.

Label the envelope's lower left with: student ID, course, and lesson numbers.

Three months are allotted for course completion.

Extensions may be granted upon request.

Your answer sheets are returned to you after review.

Keep all materials and returned answers together for future reference.

A CALL TO PRAYER

Contents – Course CTPa

Lesson 1	Prayer Is Needful to Salvation.....	3
	Study Questions	4
Lesson 2	The Habit of Prayer: Mark of a True Christian.....	5
	Study Questions – Lesson 2 The Habit of Prayer.....	7
Lesson 3	Prayer: The Most Neglected Duty.....	8
	Study Questions – Lesson 3 Prayer: The Most Neglected Duty	11
Lesson 4	Prayer Produces Great Encouragement.....	11
	Study Questions – Lesson 4 Prayer Produces Encouragement	14
Lesson 5	Diligence in Prayer: Secret of Holiness.....	15
	Study Questions – Lesson 5 Diligence in Prayer	17
Lesson 6	Prayer and Backsliding	18
	Study Questions – Lesson 6 Prayer and Backsliding	20
Lesson 7	Prayer and Contentment.....	21
	Study Questions – Lesson 7 Prayer and Contentment.....	23
Lesson 8	Advice to the Unsaved.....	24
	Study Questions – Lesson 8 Advice to the Unsaved.....	26
Lesson 9	Counsel to the Saints, Part 1.....	28
	Study Questions – Lesson 9 Counsel to the Saints, Part 1	31
Lesson 10	Counsel to the Saints, Part 2.....	32
	Study Questions – Lesson 10 Counsel to the Saints, Part 2.....	35

Sample Answer Sheet

_____	_____	<u>CTPa</u>	_____	_____
Your name	Student number	Course number	Lesson number	Date

Question # Your Answer

skip a line between questions

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A CALL TO PRAYER

Lesson 1 Prayer Is Needful to Salvation

I have a question to offer you. It is contained in three words. *Do you pray?*

The question is one that none but you can answer. Whether you attend public worship or not, your minister knows. Whether you have family prayers in your house or not, your relations know. But whether you pray in private or not, is a matter between yourself and God.

I urge you in all affection to give your attention to the subject I now bring to you. Do not say that my question is too close for comfort. If your heart is right in the sight of God, there is nothing in it to make you afraid. Do not turn off my question by replying that you “say your prayers.” It is one thing to say your prayers and another to actually *pray*. Do not tell me that my question is unnecessary. Listen to me for a few minutes, and I will show you good reasons for asking it.

Needful for salvation

I ask whether you pray because prayer is *absolutely needful to a man’s salvation*.

I say “absolutely needful,” and I say so purposefully. I speak especially of those who call themselves “Christians” in a land like our own. And of such I say, no man or woman can expect to be saved who does not pray.

I hold salvation by God’s grace, His free gift without conditions, as strongly as anyone. I would gladly offer a free and full pardon to the greatest sinner that ever lived. I would not hesitate to stand by his dying bed and say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ even now, and you shall be saved.” But that a man can have salvation without asking for it, I cannot see in the Bible. That a man will receive pardon of his sins, who will not so much as lift up his heart inwardly and say, “Lord Jesus, give it to me,” this I cannot find. I can find that nobody will be saved by his prayers, but I cannot find that without prayer anybody will be saved.

It is not absolutely needful to salvation that a man should read the Bible. A man may have no learning, or be blind, and yet have Christ in his heart. It is not absolutely needful that a man should hear public preaching of the gospel. He may live where the gospel is not preached, or he may be bedridden, or deaf. But the same thing cannot be said about prayer. It is absolutely needful to salvation that a man should pray.

Personal responsibility

There is no easy path either to health or learning. Princes and kings, poor men and peasants, all alike must attend to the needs of their own bodies and their own minds. No man can eat, drink, or sleep by proxy. No man can get the alphabet learned for him by another. All these are things that a person must do for himself, or they will not be done at all.

Just as it is with the mind and body, so it is with the soul. There are certain things absolutely needful to the soul's health and well-being. Each must attend to these things for himself. Each must repent¹ for himself. Each must apply to Christ for himself. And for himself each must speak to God and pray. You must do it for yourself because nobody else will do it for you.

To be prayerless is to be without God, without Christ, without grace, without hope, and without heaven. It is to be on the road to hell. Now can you wonder that I ask the question, *Do you pray?*

Study Questions – Lesson 1 ***Prayer Is Needful to Salvation***

Please answer the questions below from the information in this chapter. Before you begin the questions, please read the chapter completely.

Please read slowly enough so you understand what you read. Also, it is always good to pray before each lesson asking the LORD for wisdom to apply what you learn to your life—and to enable you to love Him with all your mind, heart, soul, and strength...for this is the greatest commandment (Mar 12:30).

Very Important Note: *We ask you to always get your answer from the text, but use your own words in your answer. Please do not merely quote the text for your answer. Rather, read what the text says, think about the meaning of what it says, and summarize the meaning of the text in your own words for your answer. In this way, you will learn much more than simply a “search/find/quote” method for answering the questions.*

Do you pray?

1. *Making It Personal* We encourage you to commit to pray daily in a quiet place for the duration of your taking this course.

¹ **repent** – to turn from sin and self to God, with godly sorrow for offending God and a new desire to please Him.

- a. Please write on your answer sheet where and when this will be, and indicate your commitment with your signature.
- b. Is it truly a quiet place?

Needful for salvation

2. The author makes it clear that a person is saved by God's grace, not by prayer. Why then does he say, "No man or woman can expect to be saved who does not pray"?

Personal responsibility

3. What are the consequences of being prayerless?
4. For each of the following Scriptures, write the reference and meaning of the part of the verse that is about prayer and salvation. *As always, use your own words in your answer. Do not just quote the verse.*
 - a. Romans 10:9-10
 - b. Acts 10:1-6

Lesson 2 The Habit of Prayer: Mark of a True Christian

Those who pray

I ask again whether you pray because a habit of prayer is one of the *surest marks of a true Christian*.

All the children of God on earth are alike in this respect. From the moment there is any life and reality about their religion, they pray. Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again is *praying*.

This is one of the common marks of all the elect of God, "They cry unto him day and night" (Luk 18:7). The Holy Spirit, Who makes them new creatures, works in them the feeling of adoption into God's family, and makes them cry, "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). The Lord Jesus, when He quickens them, gives them a voice and a tongue, and says to them, "Be dumb no more." God has no dumb² children. It is as much a part of their new nature to pray as it is of a child to cry. They see their need of mercy and grace. They feel their emptiness and weakness. They cannot do otherwise than they do. They *must* pray.

² **dumb** – unable to speak.

I have looked carefully over the lives of God's saints in the Bible. I cannot find one of whose history much is told us, from Genesis to Revelation, who was not a man of prayer. I find it mentioned, as a characteristic of the godly, that they call on "the Father" (1Pe 1:17) or "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1Co 1:2). Recorded as a characteristic of the wicked is the fact that "they call not upon the Lord" (Psa 14:4).

I have read the lives of many notable Christians who have been on earth since the Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, and some poor. Some were learned and some unlearned. Some of them were Episcopalians³ and some Christians of other names. But one thing I see that they all had in common: they have all been *men of prayer*.

I study the reports of missionary societies in our own times. I see with joy that heathen men and women are receiving the gospel in various parts of the globe. There are conversions in Africa, New Zealand, Hindustan, and China. The people converted are naturally unlike one another in every respect. But one striking thing I observe at all the missionary stations: the converted people *always pray*.

Not praying

I do not deny that a man may pray without heart and without sincerity. I do not for a moment pretend to say that the mere fact of a person's praying proves everything about his soul. As in every other part of religion, so also in this: there may be deception and hypocrisy.

But this I do say, that not praying is a clear proof that a man is not yet a true Christian. He cannot really feel his sins. He cannot love God. He cannot feel himself a debtor to Christ. He cannot long after holiness. He cannot desire heaven. He has yet to be born again. He has yet to be made a new creature. He may boast confidently of election, grace, faith, hope, and knowledge—and deceive ignorant people. But you may rest assured it is all vain talk *if he does not pray*.

Real evidence

Furthermore, I say that of all the evidences of the real work of the Spirit, a habit of hearty private prayer is one of the most satisfactory that can be named. A man may preach from false motives. A man may write books, make fine speeches, and seem diligent in good works—and yet be a Judas Iscariot.⁴ But a man seldom goes into a place of private prayer and pours out his soul before God in secret, unless he is in earnest. The Lord Himself has set His stamp on prayer as the best

³ **Episcopalians** – members of the Church of England, Ryle's own denomination.

⁴ **Judas Iscariot** – one of the twelve who followed Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, who proved to be unsaved and a traitor (Joh 13:21-30).

proof of a true conversion. When He sent Ananias to Saul in Damascus, He gave him no other evidence of his change of heart than this, “Behold, he prayeth” (Act 9:11).

I know that much may go on in a man’s mind before he is brought to pray. He may have many convictions, desires, wishes, feelings, intentions, resolutions, hopes, and fears. But all these things are very uncertain evidences. They are to be found in ungodly people, and often come to nothing. In many a case they are not more lasting than the morning cloud and the dew that passes away. A real, hearty prayer, coming from a humble spirit, is worth all these things put together.

I know that the Holy Spirit, Who calls sinners from their evil ways, often leads them by very slow degrees to know Christ. But the eye of man can only judge by what it sees. I cannot call anyone saved from his sins until he believes, and I dare not say that anyone believes until he prays. I cannot understand a prayerless faith. 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. How a man can live and not breathe is past my comprehension, and how a man can believe and not pray is past my comprehension too.

Never be surprised if you hear ministers of the gospel dwelling much on the importance of prayer. This is the point we want to bring you to: we want to know that you pray. Your views of doctrine may be correct. Your love of the God’s people may be warm and unmistakable. But still this may be nothing more than head knowledge and loyalty to your church. We want to know whether you are actually acquainted with the throne of grace, and whether you can speak *to* God as well as speak *about* God.

Do you wish to find out whether you are a true Christian? Then rest assured that my question is of the very first importance: *Do you pray?*

Study Questions – Lesson 2

The Habit of Prayer

First please read the preceding text. Always put what you have read into your own words in your answers, to indicate your understanding.

Those who pray

1. a. The children of God are all alike in what respect?
- b. What is the meaning of the part of Luke 18:1-7 (especially verse 7) that is about how we pray? *As always, use your own words.*
- c. *Making It Personal* Do you do this? If not, why not?

2. a. What three different groups or types of people are mentioned as *those who pray* in the section “Those who pray”?
- b. *Making It Personal* Are the observations about these groups meaningful to you? Why or why not?

Not praying

3. “Not praying is a clear proof that a man is not yet a true Christian.”
 - a. If you do not pray, what things can you do or not do as a result?
 - b. *Making It Personal* Which of these describe you?

Real evidence

4. Describe the connection between being saved, believing, and prayer?
“Being saved” is the state of being made right with God, by having your sins forgiven through faith in Christ. This is the essence of the gospel: Jesus Christ took on Himself the sins of His children, so that He could give them His righteousness instead (2Co 5:21). He did this at the cross, where He died to pay the penalty for their sins.
5. What is the connection between prayer and faith?
6. For each of the following Scriptures, write the reference and meaning of the part of the verse that is about marks of true Christians. *As always, use your own words in your answer. Do not just quote the verse.*
 - a. Ephesians 6:18
 - b. Philippians 4:6-7
 - c. Colossians 4:2

Lesson 3 Prayer: The Most Neglected Duty

Some never pray

I ask whether you pray because there is no duty in religion *so neglected as private prayer*.

We live in days of abounding religious profession.⁵ There are more places of public worship now than there ever were before. There are more persons attending them than there ever were before. And yet in spite of all this public religion, I believe there is a vast neglect of private prayer. It is one of those private communications between God and our souls that no eye sees, and therefore one that men are tempted to leave undone. I believe that thousands never utter a word of prayer at all. They eat, drink, sleep, rise, go forth to their labor, and return to their

⁵ **profession** – verbal or written expression of faith in Jesus Christ.

homes. They breathe God's air, see God's sun, walk on God's earth, and enjoy God's mercies. They have dying bodies; they have judgment and eternity before them—but they never speak to God! They live like the beasts that perish; they behave like creatures without souls. They have not one word to say to Him in Whose hand are their life and breath, and all things, and from Whose mouth they must one day receive their everlasting sentence of judgment. How dreadful this seems. But if the secrets of men were only known, how common it is.

Some use form only

I believe there are tens of thousands *whose prayers are nothing but a mere form*, a set of words repeated formally, without a thought about their meaning. Some say a few hasty sentences picked up in the nursery when they were children. Some content themselves with repeating the Apostles' Creed,⁶ forgetting that there is not a single request in it. Some add the Lord's Prayer (Mat 6:9-13), but without the slightest desire that its serious requests may be granted.

Many, even of those who use good forms, mutter their prayers after they have gotten into bed, or while they wash or dress in the morning. Men may think what they please, but they may depend upon it that in the sight of God *this is not praying*. Words said without heart are as utterly useless to our souls as the drum beating of the poor heathen before their idols. Where there is *no heart*, there may be lip work and tongue work, but there is nothing that God listens to; there is *no prayer*. Saul, I have no doubt, said many a long prayer as a Pharisee before the Lord met him on the way to Damascus. But it was not until his heart was broken that the Lord said, "He prayeth" (Act 9:11).

Does this surprise you? Listen to me, and I will show you that I am not speaking as I do without reason. Do you think that my statements are extreme and without good foundation? Give me your attention, and I will soon show you that I am only telling you the truth.

Why men do not pray

Have you forgotten that it is *not natural* for anyone to pray? "The carnal⁷ mind is enmity⁸ against God" (Rom 8:7). The desire of man's heart is to get far away from God and have nothing to do with Him. Man's feeling toward God is not love,

⁶ **Apostles' Creed** – early statement of Christian belief, which is still used widely. It is first mentioned in a letter from AD 390. It receives its name from an early tradition, widely accepted in the fourth century, that each of the twelve apostles contributed an article to the creed.

⁷ **carnal** – fleshly; sensual, as opposed to spiritual.

⁸ **enmity** – the condition of being an enemy; consider 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. See also John 12:31; 14:30; Ephesians 2:2; 6:12; 1 John 5:19.

but fear. Why then should a man pray when he has no real sense of sin, no real feeling of spiritual needs, no thorough belief in unseen things, no desire after holiness and heaven? Of all these things the vast majority of men know and feel nothing. The multitude walk in the broad way that leads to destruction (Mat 7:13). I cannot forget this. Therefore I say boldly: I believe that few pray.

Have you forgotten that it is *not fashionable* to pray? It is one of the things that many would be rather ashamed to own. There are hundreds who would sooner charge in battle, or lead a hopeless life, than confess publicly that they make a habit of prayer. There are thousands who, if obliged to sleep in the same room with a stranger, would lie down in bed without a prayer. To dress well, to go to theaters, to be thought clever and agreeable—all this is fashionable; but not to pray. I cannot forget this. I cannot think a habit is common that so many seem ashamed to own. I believe that few pray.

Have you forgotten *the lives that many live*? Can we really believe that people are praying against sin night and day, when we see them plunging into it? Can we suppose they pray against the world, when they are entirely absorbed and taken up with its activities? Can we think they really ask God for grace to serve Him, when they do not show the slightest desire to serve Him at all? Oh no, it is plain as daylight that the great majority of men either ask nothing of God or *do not mean what they say* when they do ask, which is just the same thing. Praying and sinning will never live together in the same heart. Prayer will consume sin, or sin will choke prayer. I cannot forget this. I look at men's lives; I believe that few pray.

Have you forgotten *the deaths that many die*? How many, when they draw near death, seem entirely strangers to God. Not only are they sadly ignorant of His gospel, but sadly lacking in the power of speaking to Him. There is a terrible awkwardness and shyness in their attempts to come to Him. They seem to be taking up a fresh thing. They appear as if they needed an introduction to God, and as if they had never talked with Him before. I remember having heard of a lady who was anxious to have a minister to visit her in her last illness. She desired that he would pray with her. He asked her what he should pray for. She did not know, and could not tell. She was utterly unable to name any one thing that she wished him to ask God for her soul. All she seemed to want was the form of a minister's prayers. I can quite understand this. Death beds are great revealers of secrets. I cannot forget what I have seen of sick and dying people. This also leads me to believe that few pray.

I cannot see your heart. I do not know your private history in spiritual things. But from what I see in the Bible and in the world, I am certain I cannot ask you a more necessary question than that before you: *Do you pray?*

Study Questions – Lesson 3

Prayer: The Most Neglected Duty

First please read the preceding text. Always put what you have read into your own words in your answers, to indicate your understanding.

Some never pray

1. How is not praying similar to living life “like the beasts”?

Some use form only

2. a. Why are formal forms of outward prayer said to be “not praying”?
b. *Making It Personal* How does this describe you?

Why men do not pray

3. Why is it not natural for a person to pray?
4. Why is it impossible both to flirt with sin and worldliness, and at the same time also to mean what we pray?
5. *Making It Personal*
 - a. The author mentions the following reasons or evidences of “not praying.” Which of these describe you?
 - it is not natural to pray
 - it is not fashionable to pray
 - many are taken up with the world’s activities
 - at death, many seem strangers to God
 - b. In what ways have you purposed to change?
6. For each of the following Scriptures, write the reference and meaning of the part of the verse that is about prayer as a neglected duty. *As always, use your own words in your answer. Do not just quote the verse.*
 - a. 1 Samuel 12:23
 - b. Luke 18:1
 - c. 1 Timothy 2:1

Lesson 4 Prayer Produces Great Encouragement

I ask whether you pray because in prayer there is *great encouragement*.

God is ready

There is everything on God’s part to make prayer easy, if men will only attempt it. All things are ready on His side. Every objection is anticipated. Every difficulty

is provided for. The crooked places are made straight and the rough places are made smooth. There is no excuse left for the prayerless man.

There is a *way* by which any man, however sinful and unworthy, may draw near to God the Father. Jesus Christ has opened that way by the sacrifice He made for us upon the cross (Heb 10:20). The holiness and justice of God need not frighten sinners and keep them back. Only let them cry to God in the name of Jesus, only let them plead the atoning⁹ blood of Jesus, and they shall find God upon a throne of grace, willing and ready to hear (Heb 4:16). The name of Jesus is a never-failing passport for our prayers. In that name a man may draw near to God with boldness and ask with confidence. God is ready to hear him. Think of this. Is not this encouragement?

There is an *Advocate*¹⁰ and Intercessor¹¹ always waiting to present the prayers of those who come to God through Him. That advocate is Jesus Christ. He mixes our prayers with His own almighty pleadings. So mixed together, they go up as a sweet savor before the throne of God. Poor as our prayers are in themselves, they are mighty and powerful in the hand of our High Priest and Elder Brother. The bank note without a signature at the bottom is nothing but a worthless piece of paper. The stroke of a pen confers on it all its value. The prayer of a poor child of Adam is a feeble thing in itself, but once endorsed by the hand of the Lord Jesus it availeth much. There was an officer in the city of Rome who was appointed to have his doors always open, in order to receive any Roman citizen who applied to him for help. Just so the ear of the Lord Jesus is ever open to the cry of all who want mercy and grace. It is His office to help them. Their prayer is His delight. Think of this. Is not this encouragement?

There is the *Holy Spirit* ever ready to help our weaknesses in prayer. It is one part of His special office to assist us in our efforts to speak with God. We need not be cast down and distressed by the fear of not knowing what to say. The Spirit will give us words if we seek His aid. The prayers of the Lord's people are the inspiration of the Lord's Spirit, the work of the Holy Ghost Who dwells within them as the Spirit of grace and supplication. Surely the Lord's people may well hope to be heard. It is not them merely that pray, but the Holy Ghost pleading in them. Reader, think of this. Is not this encouragement?

Promises

There are exceeding great and precious *promises* to those who pray. What did the Lord Jesus mean when He spoke such words as these:

⁹ **atoning** – reconciling or restoring to friendly relations; appeasing.

¹⁰ **Advocate** – One Who pleads on behalf of sinners.

¹¹ **Intercessor** – One Who presents sinners' interests to God.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened” (Mat 7:7-8).

“All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive” (Mat 21:22).

“Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it” (Joh 14:13-14).

What did the Lord mean when he spoke the parables of the friend at midnight and the persistent widow (Luk 11:5; 18:1)?

Think over these passages. If this is not encouragement to pray, words have no meaning!

Examples

There are wonderful *examples* in Scripture of the power of prayer. Nothing seems to be too great, too hard, or too difficult for prayer to do. It has obtained things that seemed impossible and out of reach. It has won victories over fire, air, earth, and water. Prayer opened the Red Sea. Prayer brought water from the rock and bread from heaven. Prayer made the sun stand still. Prayer brought fire from the sky on Elijah’s sacrifice. Prayer turned the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. Prayer overthrew the army of Sennacherib. Well might Mary Queen of Scotland say, “I fear John Knox’s¹² prayers more than an army of ten thousand men.” Prayer has healed the sick. Prayer has raised the dead. Prayer has procured the conversion of souls. “The child of many prayers,” said an old Christian to Augustine’s¹³ mother, “shall never perish.” Prayer, pains, and faith can do anything. Nothing seems impossible when a man has the spirit of adoption into God’s family. “Let me alone,” is the remarkable saying of God to Moses when Moses was about to intercede for the children of Israel—the Chaldee version has it as, “Leave off praying” (Exo 32:10). So long as Abraham asked mercy for Sodom, the Lord went on giving. He never ceased to give till Abraham ceased to pray (Gen 18:32-33). Think of this; is not this encouragement?

What more can a man want to lead him to take a step forward in religion, than the things I have just told him about prayer? What more could be done to make the path to the mercy seat easy, and to remove all occasions of stumbling from the

¹² **John Knox** (c.1510-1572) – Scottish clergyman; founder of the Presbyterian denominations. Learned from John Calvin at Geneva while in exile, and, on his return to Scotland, led the Protestant Reformation there.

¹³ **Augustine** (AD 354-430) – Bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa and leader in the early Christian Church; miraculously converted as a young man from a life of debauchery to become wise and godly.

sinner's way? Surely if the devils in hell had such a door set open before them, they would leap for gladness and make the very pit ring with joy.

But where will the man hide his head at last who neglects such glorious encouragements? What can possibly be said for the man who, after all, dies without prayer? Surely I may worry that you should not be that man. Surely I may well ask: *Do you pray?*

Study Questions – Lesson 4

Prayer Produces Encouragement

First please read the preceding text. Always put what you have read into your own words in your answers, to indicate your understanding.

God is ready!

1. How has God opened a *way* for you to draw near to Him?
2. Who is our Advocate before God, and how does He intercede for us?
3. How does the Holy Spirit help our weaknesses in prayer?

Promises

4. *Making It Personal* How do you respond personally to the Scriptures cited as promises to those who pray (that is, what do you think about them and how do they apply to you)?

Examples

5. What are some of the scriptural examples of prayer that are mentioned? *See if you can find some of these in the Bible. If so, list the Bible reference for each. (Use a concordance if you have one.)*
6. For each of the following Scriptures, write the reference and meaning of the part of the verse that is about encouragement to pray. *As always, use your own words in your answer. Do not just quote the verse.*
 - a. James 5:16-18
 - b. John 14:12-14
 - c. Matthew 7:7-11

Lesson 5 Diligence in Prayer: Secret of Holiness

Vast difference

I ask whether you pray because diligence in prayer is the secret of *a visible holiness*.

Without controversy there is a vast difference among true Christians. There is an immense interval between the foremost and the hindermost in the army of God. They are all fighting the same good fight, but how much more bravely some fight than others. They are all doing the Lord's work, but how much more some do than others. They are all light in the Lord, but how much more brightly some shine than others. They are all running the same race, but how much faster some get on than others. They all love the same Lord and Savior, but how much more some love Him than others. I ask any true Christian whether this is not the case. Are not these things so?

There are some of the Lord's people who seem *never able to get on* from the time of their conversion. They are born again, but they remain babes all their lives. You hear from them the same old experience. You observe in them the same lack of spiritual appetite, the same lack of interest in anything beyond their own little circle, which you also observed ten years ago. They are pilgrims, indeed, but pilgrims like the Gibeonites of old; their bread is always dry and moldy, their shoes always old, and their garments always rent and torn (Jos 9). I say this with sorrow and grief; but I ask any real Christian, Is it not true?

There are others of the Lord's people who seem to be always advancing. They grow like the grass after rain; they increase like Israel in Egypt. They press on like Gideon: though sometimes faint, yet always pursuing. They are ever adding grace to grace, and faith to faith, and strength to strength. Every time you meet them their hearts seem larger, and their spiritual stature taller and stronger. Every year they appear to see more, know more, believe more, and feel more in their religion. They not only have good works to prove the reality of their faith, but they are enthusiastic about them. They not only do well, but they are not tired in well-doing. They attempt great things, and they do great things. When they fail they try again, and when they fall they are soon up again. And all this time they think themselves poor, unprofitable servants, and fancy they do nothing at all (Luk 17:10). These are those who make religion lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all. They receive praise even from the unconverted, and win approval even from the selfish men of the world.

It does one good to see, to be with, and to hear them. When you meet them, you could believe that, like Moses, they had just come out from the presence of God. When you part with them you feel warmed by their company, as if your soul had been near a fire. I know such people are rare; I only ask: Are there not many such?

The reason for the difference

Now how can we account for the difference that I have just described? What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe the difference, in nineteen cases out of twenty, arises from different habits about private prayer. I believe that those who are not very holy pray *little*, and those who are very holy pray *much*.

I dare say this opinion will startle some readers. I have little doubt that many look on visible holiness as a kind of special gift that none but a few must pretend to aim at. They admire it at a distance in books. They think it beautiful when they see an example near themselves. But as to its being a thing within the reach of any but a very few, such an idea never seems to enter their minds. In short, they consider it a kind of monopoly granted to a few favored believers, but certainly not to all.

Now I believe that this is a most dangerous mistake. I believe that spiritual as well as natural greatness depends in a high degree on the faithful use of resources within everybody's reach. Of course I do not say we have a right to expect a miraculous grant of intellectual gifts; but this I do say, that when a man is once converted to God, his progress in holiness will be much in accordance with his own diligence in the use of God's appointed means.¹⁴ And I assert confidently that the principal means by which most believers have become great in the church of Christ is the habit of *diligent private prayer*.

Prayer is power

Look through the lives of the brightest and best of God's servants, whether in the Bible or not. See what is written of Moses, David, Daniel, and Paul. Mark what is recorded of Luther¹⁵ and the Reformers.¹⁶ Observe what is related of the private

¹⁴ **means** of grace – instruments that God is pleased to use in order to accomplish salvation and sanctification in the hearts of men: the preaching of the Word, Bible reading and study, prayer, baptism, the Lord's Supper, family worship, singing, and godly fellowship with believers.

¹⁵ **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German Roman Catholic monk, theologian, university professor, and church reformer, whose writings and preaching inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.

devotions of Whitefield¹⁷ and M'Cheyne.¹⁸ Tell me one, of all the goodly fellowship of saints and martyrs, who has not had this mark most clearly: he was a *man of prayer*. Depend upon it: prayer is power.

Prayer obtains fresh and continued outpourings of the Spirit. He alone begins the work of grace in a man's heart. He alone can carry it forward and make it prosper. But the good Spirit loves to be asked for things. And those who ask most will have most of His influence.

Prayer is the surest remedy against the devil and habitual sins. The sin that is heartily prayed against will never stand firm. That devil which we urge the Lord to cast forth will never long keep dominion over us. Therefore, we must spread out all our case before our heavenly Physician, if he is to give us daily relief. *Do you pray?*

Study Questions – Lesson 5

Diligence in Prayer

First please read the preceding text. Always put what you have read into your own words in your answers, to indicate your understanding.

A vast difference in holiness

1. What are some characteristics of those who seem not to advance in the Christian life?
2. What are some characteristics of those who seem always to be advancing in the Christian life?

The reason for the difference

3. Describe the main reason for the difference.
4. Explain the misunderstanding that some believers have about the nature of holiness.
5. *Making It Personal* The author states: “spiritual...greatness depends in a high degree on the faithful use of *resources* within everybody's reach.” If diligent private prayer is the principle resource that God uses for progress in holiness, then true holiness is available to all believers. It is not dependent

¹⁶ **Reformers** – men who led the 16th century Protestant Reformation to re-establish the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, including Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox.

¹⁷ **George Whitefield** (1714-1770) – best-known evangelist of the 18th century and an itinerant preacher that God greatly used in England and the American Colonies during the “Great Awakening.”

¹⁸ **Robert Murray M'Cheyne** (1813-1843) – Scottish pastor known as one of the most godly men of the nineteenth century.

upon some special talent or gift from God. *If* you will pray regularly and diligently, *then* God will cause you to grow in holiness.

- a. What is your personal response to this availability?
- b. What commitment will you make to develop the discipline of diligent private prayer?

Prayer is power

6. *Making It Personal* Have you known some “prayer warriors” personally? What was their degree of holiness?
7. “Prayer obtains fresh...outpourings of the Spirit.” Why is this important?
8. How is prayer “the surest remedy against...habitual sin”?
9. *Making It Personal* Please consider making a commitment to pray regularly for the filling of the Spirit, and against a specific sinful habit that you want to stop.
If you have made such a commitment, indicate on your answer sheet what it is.
10. For each of the following Scriptures, write the reference and meaning of the part of the verse that is about prayer and holiness. *As always, use your own words in your answer. Do not just quote the verse.*
 - a. Jeremiah 29:13
 - b. Daniel 6:10, 23

Lesson 6 Prayer and Backsliding

Backsliding really happens

Do you wish to grow in grace and be a devoted Christian? Be very sure, if you wish it; you could not have a more important question than this: Do you pray? I ask whether you pray, because *neglect of prayer is one great cause of backsliding*.

There is such a thing as going back in religion after making a good profession. Men may run well for a season, like the Galatians, and then turn aside after false teachers (Gal 1:6). Men may profess loudly while their feelings are warm, as Peter did, and then in the hour of trial deny their Lord (Mat 26:74-75). Men may lose their first love as the Ephesians did (Rev 2:4). Men may cool down in their zeal to do good, like Mark the companion of Paul (Act 15:37-38). Men may follow an apostle for a season, and like Demas go back to the world (2Ti 4:10). All these things men may do.

It is a miserable thing to be a backslider. Of all unhappy things that can befall a man, I suppose it is the worst. A stranded ship, a broken-winged eagle, a garden

overrun with weeds, a harp without strings, a church in ruins, all these are sad sights—but a backslider is a sadder sight still. A wounded conscience, a mind sick of itself, a memory full of self-reproach, a heart pierced through with the Lord's arrows, a spirit broken with a load of inward accusation—all this is a *taste of hell*. It is a small example of hell on earth. Truly that saying of the wise man is solemn and weighty, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Pro 14:14).

The cause of backsliding

Now what is the cause of most backslidings? I believe, as a general rule, one of the chief causes is neglect of private prayer. Of course, the secret history of falls will not be known till the last day; I can only give my opinion as a minister of Christ and a student of the heart. That opinion is, I repeat, that backsliding generally first begins with *neglect of private prayer*.

Bibles read without prayer, sermons heard without prayer, marriages contracted without prayer, journeys undertaken without prayer, residences chosen without prayer, friendships formed without prayer, the daily act of private prayer itself hurried over or gone through without heart—these are the kind of downward steps by which many a Christian descends to a condition of spiritual sickness, or reaches the point where God allows him to have a tremendous fall. This is the process that forms the lingering Lots, the unstable Samsons, the wife-idolizing Solomons, the inconsistent Asas, the compromising Jehoshaphats, the over-careful Marthas—of whom so many are to be found in the church of Christ. Often the simple history of such cases is this: they became *careless about private prayer*.

It is hidden at first

You may be very sure men fall in private long before they fall in public. They are backsliders on their knees long before they backslide openly in the eyes of the world. Like Peter, they first disregard the Lord's warning to watch and pray; and then like Peter, their strength is gone, and in the hour of temptation they deny their Lord.

The world takes notice of their fall, and scoffs loudly. But the world knows nothing of the real reason. The heathen succeeded in making a well-known Christian offer incense to an idol, by threatening him with a punishment worse than death. They then triumphed greatly at the sight of his cowardice and apostasy. But the heathen did not know the fact of which history informs us, that on that very morning he had left his bed chamber hastily, and without finishing his usual prayers.

If you are a Christian indeed, I trust you will never be a backslider. But if you do not wish to be a backsliding Christian, remember the question I ask you: *Do you pray?*

Study Questions – Lesson 6

Prayer and Backsliding

First please read the preceding text. Always put what you have read into your own words in your answers, to indicate your understanding.

Backsliding really happens

1. What are some evidences of “backsliding”?
2. a. List some of the personal consequences of being a backslider.
b. Why are these described as a small example of “hell on earth?”

Note: The author tends to use the term “backslider” to apply to each moment when we look down at our problems, losing the joy of the Lord. In our modern day, we tend to accept a momentary “looking down at our problems” without calling it “backsliding.” In our day, “backsliding” often refers more to longer term habit patterns of straying away from the Lord as a life-style.

The cause of backsliding

3. a. What are some of the examples given from daily life that are described as “downward steps” into backsliding?
b. *Making It Personal* Are you taking similar steps? How?
4. What is the principle cause of backsliding?

It is hidden at first

5. *Making It Personal*
 - a. Are there hidden parts of your own life that no one knows, which in fact are sowing the seeds of backsliding?
 - b. If so, what will you purpose to change?
6. For each of the following Scriptures, write the reference and meaning of the part of the verse that is about prayer and backsliding. *As always, use your own words in your answer. Do not just quote the verse.*
 - a. Isaiah 1:9-18
 - b. Psalm 66:18
 - c. Proverbs 15:8
 - d. Jeremiah 3:12-14

Lesson 7 Prayer and Contentment

I ask, lastly, whether you pray, because prayer is one of the best means of *happiness and contentment*.

Sorrow abounds

We live in a world where there is much sorrow. This has always been its state since sin came in. There cannot be sin without sorrow. And until sin is driven out from the world, it is hopeless for anyone to think he can escape sorrow.

Some without doubt have a larger cup of sorrow to drink than others. But few are to be found who live long without sorrows or cares of one sort or another. Our bodies, our property, our families, our children, our relations, our friends, our neighbors, our jobs—each and all of these are fountains of sorrow. Sickesses, deaths, losses, disappointments, partings, separations, ingratitude, slander—all these are common things. We cannot get through life without them. Some day or other they find us out. The greater are our affections, the deeper are our afflictions; and the more we love, the more we have to weep.

The answer to sorrow

What is the best means of cheerfulness in such a world as this? How shall we get through this valley of tears with least pain? I know no better means than the regular, habitual practice of *taking everything to God in prayer*.

This is the plain advice that the Bible gives, both in the Old Testament and the New. What says the psalmist? “Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psa 50:15). “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (Psa 55:22). What says the apostle Paul? “Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phi 4:6-7). What says the apostle James? “Is any afflicted among you? let him pray” (Jam 5:13).

This was the practice of all the saints whose history we have recorded in the Scriptures. This is what Jacob did when he feared his brother Esau. This is what Moses did when the people were ready to stone him in the wilderness. This is what Joshua did after Israel was defeated before the men of Ai. This is what David did when he was in danger at Keilah. This is what Hezekiah did when he received the letter from Sennacherib. This is what the church did when Peter was put in prison. This is what Paul did when he was cast into the dungeon at Philippi.

Our friend is Jesus

The only way to be really happy in such a world as this, is to be always casting all our cares on God. It is trying to carry their own burdens that so often makes believers sad. If they will tell their troubles to God, He will enable them to bear them as easily as Samson did the gates of Gaza (Jdg 16:3). If they are resolved to keep them to themselves, they will find one day that the very grasshopper is a burden.

There is a friend ever waiting to help us, if we will share with Him our sorrow—a friend Who pitied the poor and sick and sorrowful when He was upon earth; a friend Who knows the heart of man, for He lived thirty-three years as a man among us; a friend Who can weep with the weepers, for He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; a friend Who is able to help us, for there never was earthly pain He could not cure. That friend is Jesus Christ. The way to be happy is to be always opening our hearts to Him. Oh that we were all like that poor Christian who, when threatened and punished, answered only: *“I must tell the Lord.”*

Jesus can make those happy who trust Him and call on Him, whatever be their outward condition. He can give them peace of heart in a prison, contentment in the midst of poverty, comfort in the midst of grief, joy on the brink of the grave. There is a mighty fullness in Him for all his believing members, a fullness that is ready to be poured out on everyone that will ask in prayer. Oh, if men would understand that happiness does not depend on outward circumstances, but on the state of the heart!

Results of prayer

Prayer can lighten crosses for us, however heavy. It can bring down to our side Jesus Christ, Who will help us to bear them. Prayer can open a door for us when our way seems at a dead end. It can bring down One Who will say, “This is the way, walk in it” (Isa 30:21). Prayer can let in a ray of hope when all our earthly possibilities seem darkened. It can bring down One Who will say, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). Prayer can obtain relief for us when those we love most are taken away, and the world feels empty. It can bring down One Who can fill the gap in our hearts with Himself, and say to the waves within, “Peace; be still” (Mar 4:39). Oh that men were not so like Hagar in the wilderness, blind to the well of living waters close beside them (Gen 21:19).

I want you to be happy. I trust I have brought before you things that will be seriously considered. I heartily pray God that this consideration may be blessed to your soul. I know I cannot ask you a more useful question than this: *Do you pray?*

Study Questions – Lesson 7

Prayer and Contentment

First please read the preceding text. Always put what you have read into your own words in your answers, to indicate your understanding.

Sorrow abounds

1. Why is it true that “the more we love, the more we weep”?

The answer to sorrow

2. a. What is the best means of overcoming sorrow?
b. *Making It Personal* To what degree have *you* made this a habit?
3. *Making It Personal* Of the four passages of Scripture listed in this section, which is most meaningful to you personally? Why?

Our friend is Jesus

4. a. What two opposite activities are the sources for being either happy or sad?
b. *Making It Personal* Which do you do more often? Why?
5. In what four ways is Jesus revealed as our friend?
6. a. On what does happiness depend? On what does it not depend?
b. *This is a life-changing truth!* Please let it sink into your mind and heart!
Making It Personal To what degree do you *really believe* it? To what degree do you *really practice* it?

Results of prayer

7. What are the four results of prayer mentioned, and how does Christ bring about each?
8. For each of the following Scriptures, write the reference and meaning of the part of the verse that is about prayer and contentment. *As always, use your own words in your answer. Do not just quote the verse.*
 - a. Isaiah 26:3
 - b. Matthew 6:31-33
 - c. Psalm 55:22
 - d. 1 Peter 5:6-7

Lesson 8 Advice to the Unsaved

There is no excuse

Let me speak a parting word to those who do not pray. I dare not suppose that all who read these pages are praying people. If you are a prayerless person, allow me to speak to you this day on God's behalf.

Prayerless reader, I can only warn you—but I do warn you most solemnly. I warn you that you are in a position of fearful danger. If you die in your present state, you are a lost soul. You will only rise again to be eternally miserable. I warn you that of all professing Christians you are most utterly without excuse. There is not a single good reason that you can show for living without prayer.

It is useless to say you *know not how to pray*. Prayer is the simplest act in all religion; it is simply speaking to God. It needs neither learning nor wisdom nor book knowledge to begin it; it needs nothing but heart and will. The weakest infant can cry when he is hungry. The poorest beggar can hold out his hand for alms and does not wait to find fine words. The most ignorant man will find something to say to God, if he has only a mind.

It is useless to say you have *no convenient place* to pray in. Any man can find a place private enough, if he is disposed. Our Lord prayed on a mountain, Peter on the housetop, Isaac in the field, Nathaniel under the fig tree, Jonah in the whale's belly. Any place may become a "closet"¹⁹ and be to us the presence of God.

It is useless to say you *have no time*. There is plenty of time, if men will use it. Time may be short, but time is always long enough for prayer. Daniel had the affairs of a kingdom on his hands, and yet he prayed three times a day. David was ruler over a mighty nation and yet he says, "Evening and morning and at noon will I pray" (Psa 55:17). When time is really desired, time can always be found.

It is useless to say you *cannot pray till you have faith and a new heart*, and that you must sit still and wait for them. This is to add sin to sin. It is bad enough to be unconverted and going to hell. It is even worse to say, "I know it, but I will not cry for mercy." This is a kind of argument for which there is no warrant in Scripture. "Call ye upon the Lord," says Isaiah, "while he is near" (Isa 55:6). "Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord," says Hosea (Hos 14:1). "Repent and pray," says Peter to Simon Magus (Act 8:22). If you want faith and a new heart, go and cry to the Lord for them. The very attempt to pray has often been used of the Lord to make a dead soul alive.

¹⁹ "closet" – Christians often refer to their "prayer closet," meaning a private and quiet place where they will not be interrupted during prayer.

Oh, prayerless reader, who and what are you that you will not ask anything of God? Have you made a covenant with death and hell? Are you at peace with the worm and the fire? Have you no sins to be pardoned? Have you no fear of eternal torment? Have you no desire after heaven? Oh that you would awake from your present folly. Oh that you would consider your latter end. Oh that you would arise and call upon God. Alas, there is a day coming when many shall pray loudly, "Lord, Lord, open to us" (Mat 25:11), but all too late; when many shall cry to the rocks to fall on them and the hills to cover them, who would never cry to God (Luk 22:30). In all affection, I warn you: beware lest this be the end of your soul. Salvation is very near you. Do not lose heaven for lack of asking.

Do you desire salvation?

Let me speak to those who have real desires for salvation, but know not what steps to take or where to begin. I cannot but hope that some readers may be in this state of mind, and if there be but one such I must offer him affectionate counsel.

In every journey there must be a first step. There must be a change from sitting still to moving forward. The travels of Israel from Egypt to Canaan were long and tiresome. Forty years passed away before they crossed Jordan. Yet there was someone who moved first when they first began to march. When does a man really take his first step in coming out from sin and the world? He does it in the day when he first prays with his heart.

In every building the first stone must be laid and the first blow must be struck. The ark was one hundred and twenty years in building. Yet there was a day when Noah laid his axe to the first tree he cut down to form it. The Temple of Solomon was a glorious building. But there was a day when the first huge stone was laid at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. When does the building of the Spirit really begin to appear in a man's heart? It begins, so far as we can judge, when he first pours out his heart to God in prayer.

What to do

If you desire salvation, and want to know what to do, I advise you to go this very day to the Lord Jesus Christ, in the first private place you can find, and ask Him in prayer from your heart to save your soul.

Tell Him that you have heard that He receives sinners, and has said, "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out" (Joh 6:37). Tell Him that you are a poor vile sinner, and that you come to Him on the faith of His own invitation. Tell Him you put yourself wholly and entirely in His hands; that you feel vile, helpless, and hopeless in yourself; and that except He saves you, you have no hope of being saved at all. Urge Him to deliver you from the guilt, power, and consequences of

sin. Urge Him to pardon you and wash you in His own blood. Urge Him to give you a new heart and plant the Holy Spirit in your soul. Urge Him to give you grace, faith, will, and power to be His disciple and servant from this day forever. Oh, reader, go this very day and tell these things to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you really are sincere about your soul.

Tell Him in your own way and in your own words. If a doctor came to see you when sick, you could tell him where you felt pain. If your soul feels its disease indeed, you can surely find something to tell Christ.

Doubt not

Doubt not His willingness to save you because you are a sinner. It is Christ's office to save sinners. He says Himself, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luk 5:32).

Do not wait because you feel unworthy. Wait for nothing; wait for nobody—waiting comes from the devil. Just as you are, go to Christ. The worse you are, the more need you have to apply to Him. You will never mend yourself by staying away.

Fear not because your speech is stammering, your words feeble, and your language poor. Jesus can understand you. Just as a mother understands the first mumbling of her infant, so does the blessed Savior understand sinners. He can read a sigh and see a meaning in a groan.

Despair not because you do not get an answer immediately. While you are speaking, Jesus is listening. If He delays an answer, it is only for wise reasons, and to test you to see if you are in earnest. The answer will surely come. Though it may seem delayed, wait for it. It will surely come.

Oh, reader, if you have any desire to be saved, remember the advice I have given you this day. Act upon it honestly and heartily, and you *shall* be saved!

Study Questions – Lesson 8

Advice to the Unsaved

First please read the preceding text. Always put what you have read into your own words in your answers, to indicate your understanding.

There is no excuse

1. "Prayerless reader...if you die in your present state, you are a lost soul!"
Making It Personal If you profess to know Christ, but do not pray privately, are you surprised the author concludes that your salvation is in question? How do you respond to this?
2. What is the answer to the person who says, "I don't know how to pray"?

3. What is the answer to the person who says, "I have no convenient place to pray"?
4. What is the answer to the one who says, "I have no time to pray"?
5. What is the answer to the person who says, "I cannot pray until I have faith and a new heart," and who sits and waits for these to be given to him?
6. "Oh, prayerless reader...In all affection I warn you, beware lest this be the end of your soul. Salvation is very near you. Do not lose heaven for lack of asking."

Making It Personal What is your personal response to this, and to the questions in the last paragraph of this section?

Do you desire salvation?

7. a. When does a man really take his first step in coming out from sin and the world?
- b. When does the building of the Spirit really begin to appear in a man's heart?

What to do

8. Making It Personal
 - a. Do you desire salvation?
 - b. What should you do if you desire salvation, and want to know what to do next?
 - c. Have you done this?
9. Summarize what we might say to Jesus when we ask Him to save us.

Please remember that the author only suggests these specific words. They serve only as a guide. When praying for salvation, use your own words and pray with a sincere heart—for God looks on the heart, not on the outward appearance (1Sa 16:7).

Doubt not

10. What answer does the author give for each of these concerns:
 - a. "Doubt not His willingness to save you."
 - b. "Wait not because you feel unworthy."
 - c. "Fear not because your speech is stammering."
 - d. "Despair not because you do not get an answer immediately."
 - e. *Making It Personal* Which of these concerns have applied to you, and what is your response now?
11. For each of the following Scriptures, write the reference and meaning of the part of the verse about advice to the unsaved. *As always, use your own words in your answer. Do not just quote the verse.*

- a. Isaiah 55:6-7
- b. Matthew 11:28-30
- c. John 6:27, 34-35

Lesson 9 Counsel to the Saints, Part 1

The Struggle

Let me speak, lastly, to those who *do* pray. I trust that some who read this know well what prayer is and have the Spirit of adoption into God's family (Rom 8:15; Eph 1:5). To all such, I offer a few words of brotherly counsel and urging. The incense offered in the tabernacle was ordered to be made in a particular way; not every kind of incense would do. Let us remember this, and be careful about the matter and manner of our prayers.

Brethren who pray, if I know anything of a Christian's heart, you are often sick of your own prayers. You never enter into the apostle's words, "When I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom 7:21), so thoroughly as you sometimes do upon your knees. You can understand David's words, "I hate vain thoughts" (Psa 119:113). You can sympathize with that poor converted savage who was overheard praying, "Lord, deliver me from all my enemies, and above all, from that bad man—myself." There are few children of God who do not often find the season of prayer a season of conflict. The devil has special wrath against us when he sees us on our knees. Yet, I believe that prayers which cost us no trouble should be regarded with great suspicion. I believe we are very poor judges of the goodness of our prayers, and that the prayer which pleases us *least*, often pleases God *most*. One thing we all feel at least: we must pray. We cannot give it up. We must go on. Allow me then, as a companion in the Christian warfare, to urge you onward in several ways.

Position

I commend to your attention the importance of *reverence and humility* in prayer. Let us never forget what we are and what a solemn thing it is to speak with God. Let us beware of rushing into His presence with carelessness and levity. Let us say to ourselves: "I am on holy ground. This is no other than the gate of heaven. If I do not mean what I say, I am trifling with God. If I put up with sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Let us keep in mind the words of Solomon, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou on earth" (Ecc 5:2). When Abraham spoke to

God, he said he was “but dust and ashes” (Gen 18:27). When Job spoke to God, he said, “I am vile” (Job 40:4). Let us do likewise.

I commend to you the importance of praying *spiritually*. I mean by that, that we should labor always to have the direct help of the Spirit in our prayers, and beware above all things of formality. There is nothing so spiritual but that it may become a form, and this is especially true of private prayer. Unaware, we may get into the habit of using the fittest possible words and offering the most scriptural petitions, and yet do it all formally without feeling it, and walk daily round an old beaten path. I desire to touch this point with caution and delicacy. I know that there are certain great things we need daily, and that there is nothing necessarily formal in asking for these things in the same words. The world, the devil, and our hearts are daily the same; of necessity we must daily go over old ground. But this I say: we must be very careful on this point. If the skeleton and outline of our prayers be by habit almost a form, let us strive that the clothing and filling up of our prayers be as much as possible of the Spirit. As to praying out of a book in our private devotions, I do not think it is a good idea. If we can tell our doctors the state of our bodies without a book, we ought to be able to tell the state of our souls to God. I have no objection to a man using crutches when he is first recovering from a broken limb. It is better to use crutches than not to walk at all. But if I saw him all his life on crutches, I should not think it matter for congratulation. I should like to see him strong enough to throw his crutches away.

Practice

I commend to you the importance of making prayer *a regular business of life*. There is value of regular times in the day for prayer. God is a God of order. The hours for morning and evening sacrifice in the Jewish Temple were not fixed as they were without a meaning. Disorder is visibly one of the results of sin. But I would not bring any under bondage. This only I say: that it is essential to your soul’s health to make praying a part of the business of every twenty-four hours in your life. Just as you allot time to eating, sleeping, and business, so also allot time to prayer. Choose your own hours and seasons. At the very least, speak with God in the morning before you speak with the world, and speak with God at night after you have done with the world. But settle it in your minds that prayer is one of the great things of every day. Do not drive it into a corner. Do not give it the scraps and parings of your duty. Whatever else you make a business of, make a business of prayer.

I commend to you the importance of *continuing steadfastly* in prayer. Once having begun the habit, never give it up. Your heart will sometimes say, “You have had family prayers: what mighty harm if you leave private prayer undone?” Your body will sometimes say, “You are unwell, or sleepy, or weary; you need not

pray.” Your mind will sometimes say, “You have important business to attend to today: cut short your prayers.” Look on all such suggestions as coming direct from Satan. They are all as good as saying, “Neglect your soul.” I do not maintain that prayers should always be of the same length, but I do say: let no excuse make you give up prayer.

Paul said, “Continue in prayer” (Col 4:2) and “Pray without ceasing” (1Th 5:17). He did not mean that men should be always on their knees, but he did mean that our prayers should be, like the continual burnt offering, continued steadily every day; that it should be like seed time and harvest, and summer and winter, unceasingly coming round at regular seasons; that it should be like the fire on the altar, not always consuming sacrifices, but never completely going out. Never forget that you may tie together morning and evening devotions by an endless chain of short ejaculatory prayers throughout the day. Even in company, business, or in the very streets, you may be silently sending up little winged messengers to God—as Nehemiah did in the very presence of Artaxerxes (Neh 2:4). And never think that time is wasted which is given to God. A nation does not become poorer because it loses one year of working days in seven by keeping the Sabbath. A Christian never finds he is a loser, in the long run, by continuing steadfastly in prayer.

Attitude

I commend to you the importance of *sincerity* in prayer. It is not necessary that a man should shout, scream, or be very loud in order to prove that he is serious and sincere. But it is desirable that we should be hearty, fervent, and warm, and ask as if we were really interested in what we were doing. It is the “effectual fervent” prayer that receives “much” (Jam 5:16). This is the lesson that is taught us by the expressions used in Scripture about prayer: it is called, “crying, knocking, wrestling, laboring, striving.”

This is the lesson taught us by Scripture examples. Jacob is one. He said to the angel at Penuel, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen 32:26). Daniel is another. Hear how he pleaded with God: “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God” (Dan 9:19). Our Lord Jesus Christ is another. It is written of him, “In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears” (Heb 5:7). Alas, how unlike is this to many of our supplications! How tame and lukewarm they seem by comparison. How truly might God say to many of us, “You do not really want what you pray for.”

Let us try to fix this fault. Let us knock loudly at the door of grace, like Mercy in *The Pilgrim's Progress*,²⁰ as if we will die unless heard. Let us settle it in our minds, that cold prayers are a sacrifice without fire. Let us remember the story of Demosthenes the great Greek orator, when one came to him and wanted him to plead his cause. He heard the man without attention while he told his story casually. The man saw this, and cried out with intensity that it was all true. "Ah," said Demosthenes, "I believe you *now*."

I commend to you the importance of *praying with faith*. We should try to believe that our prayers are heard, and that if we ask things according to God's will, we shall be answered. This is the plain command of our Lord Jesus Christ: " whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mar 11:24). Faith is to prayer what the feather is to the arrow: without it prayer will not hit the mark.

We should cultivate the habit of *pleading promises* in our prayers. We should take with us some promise, and say, "Lord, here is Your own word pledged. Do for us as You have said." This was the habit of Jacob, Moses, and David. The 119th Psalm is full of things asked "according to thy word."

Above all, we should cultivate the habit of *expecting answers* to our prayers. We should do like the merchant who sends his ships to sea for trading: we should not be satisfied unless we see some profit in return. Alas, there are few points on which Christians come short so much as this. The church at Jerusalem made prayer without ceasing for Peter in prison; but when the prayer was answered, they would hardly believe it (Act 12:15)! It is a solemn saying of Traill,²¹ "There is no surer mark of trifling in prayer, than when men are careless what they get by prayer."

Study Questions – Lesson 9

Counsel to the Saints, Part 1

First please read the preceding text. Always put what you have read into your own words in your answers, to indicate your understanding.

The struggle

1. Why is it that we often feel our own prayers are unworthy?

²⁰ *The Pilgrim's Progress* – classic Christian allegory, written by John Bunyan (1628-1688) while he was imprisoned 12 years; first published in 1678, it has been in print continuously ever since. Some claim it to be the second best-selling book in the English language after the Bible.

²¹ **Robert Traill** (1642-1716) – English Puritan; Presbyterian minister and author.

Position

2. Why are *reverence and humility* important in our prayers?
3. a. What does it mean to pray *spiritually*?
b. Why is this important?
4. Why is cold, formal prayer to be avoided?

Practice

5. Why is it important to make prayer a *regular part of your life*?
6. a. What are three common reasons that people skip praying, which come directly from the enemy?
b. *Making It Personal* Which of these have you experienced personally?
7. The apostle Paul said “Continue in prayer” and “Pray without ceasing” (Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
How are we to do this practically, in the midst of busy days?

Attitude

8. What is meant by *sincerity* in prayer?
9. a. What does it mean to pray with *faith*?
b. In our praying, how can we increase faith?

Lesson 10 Counsel to the Saints, Part 2

Asking

I commend to you the importance of *boldness* in prayer. There is an unseemly familiarity in some men’s prayers, which I cannot praise. But there is such a thing as a holy boldness, which is exceedingly to be desired. I mean such boldness as that of Moses, when he pleads with God not to destroy Israel. “Wherefore,” says he, “should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains? Turn from thy fierce anger” (Exo 32:12). I mean such boldness as that of Joshua, when the children of Israel were defeated before men of Ai: “What,” says he, “wilt thou do unto thy great name?” (Jos 7:9). This is the boldness for which Luther was remarkable. One who heard him praying said, “What a spirit, what a confidence was in his very expressions. With such a reverence he pleaded, as one begging of God; and yet with such hope and assurance, as if he spoke with a loving father or friend.” This is the boldness that distinguished Bruce, a great Scotch theologian of the seventeenth century. His prayers were said to be “like lightning bolts shot up into heaven.” Here also I fear we sadly come short. We do not realize enough the believer’s privileges. We do not plead as often

as we might, “Lord, are we not Your own people? Is it not for Your glory that we should be made holy? Is it not for Your honor that Your gospel should increase?”

I commend to you the importance of *fullness* in prayer. I do not forget that our Lord warns us against the example of the Pharisees who, for pretense, made long prayers; and commands us when we pray not to use meaningless repetitions (Mat 6:7). But I cannot forget, on the other hand, that He has given His own approval to large and long devotions by Himself continuing all night in prayer to God. In any event, we are not likely in this day to err on the side of praying *too much*. Might it not rather be feared that many believers in this generation pray *too little*? Is not the actual amount of time that many Christians give to prayer, in the total, very small? I am afraid these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily.

I am afraid the private devotions of many are most painfully brief and limited—just enough to prove they are alive and no more. They really seem to want little from God. They seem to have little to confess, little to ask for, and little to thank Him for. Alas, this is altogether wrong! Nothing is more common than to hear believers complaining that they do not have joy. They tell us that they do not grow in grace as they could desire. Is it not rather to be suspected that many have quite as much grace as they ask for? Is it not the true account of many that they have little because they ask little? The cause of their weakness is to be found in their own stunted, dwarfish, clipped, shortened, hurried, narrow prayers. *They have not, because they ask not* (Jam 4:32). Oh, we are not limited in Christ, but in ourselves. The Lord says, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” But we are like the King of Israel who struck the ground thrice and stopped, when he ought to have struck five or six times (2Ki 13:18).

I commend to you the importance of being *particular* in prayer. We ought not to be content with great general petitions. We ought to specify our needs before the throne of grace. It should not be enough to confess we are sinners: we should name the sins of which our conscience tells us we are most guilty. It should not be enough to ask for holiness: we should name the graces in which we feel most deficient. It should not be enough to tell the Lord we are in trouble: we should describe our trouble and all its details. This is what Jacob did when he feared his brother Esau. He tells God exactly what it is that he fears (Gen 32:11). This is what Eliezer did when he sought a wife for his master’s son. He spreads before God precisely what he needs (Gen 24:12). This is what Paul did when he had a thorn in the flesh: he sought the Lord (2Co 12:8).

This is true faith and confidence. We should believe that nothing is too small to be named before God. What should we think of the patient who told his doctor he was ill, but never went into the details? What should we think of the wife who told her husband she was unhappy, but did not specify the cause? What should we

think of the child who told his father he was in trouble, but nothing more? Christ is the true bridegroom of the soul, the true physician of the heart, the real father of all His people. Let us show that we feel this by being unreserved in our communications with Him. Let us hide no secrets from Him. Let us tell Him all our hearts.

I commend to you the importance of *pleading for others* in our prayers. We are all selfish by nature, and our selfishness is very apt to stick to us even when we are converted. There is a tendency in us to think only of our own souls, our own spiritual conflicts, our own progress in religion, and to forget others. Against this tendency we all have need to watch and strive, and not least in our prayers. We should study to be of a public spirit. We should stir ourselves up to name other names besides our own before the throne of grace. We should try to bear in our hearts the whole world, the heathen, the Jews, the body of true believers, the professing Protestant churches, the country in which we live, the congregation to which we belong, the household in which we reside, the friends and relations we are connected with. For each and all of these we should plead.

This is the highest charity. He loves me best who loves me in his prayers. This is for our soul's health. It enlarges our sympathies and expands our hearts. This is for the benefit of the church. The wheels of all machinery for extending the gospel are moved by prayer. They do as much for the Lord's cause who plead for others like Moses on the mount, as they do who fight like Joshua in the thick of the battle. This is to be like Christ. He bears the names of His people, as their High Priest, before the Father. Oh, the privilege of being like Jesus! This is to be a true helper to ministers. If I must choose a congregation, give me a people that pray.

Thanksgiving

I commend to you the importance of *thankfulness* in prayer. I know well that asking God is one thing and praising God is another. But I see so close a connection between prayer and praise in the Bible, that I dare not call that true prayer in which thankfulness has no part. It is not for nothing that Paul says, "By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6). "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col 4:2). It is of mercy that we are not in hell. It is of mercy that we have the hope of heaven. It is of mercy that we live in a land of spiritual light. It is of mercy that we have been called by the Spirit, and not left to reap the fruit of our own ways. It is of mercy that we still live and have opportunities of glorifying God actively and passively, [in our service and in our prayer life]. Surely these thoughts should crowd on our minds whenever we speak with God. Surely we should never open our lips in prayer without blessing God for that free grace by which we live, and for that loving kindness which endures forever.

Never was there an notable saint who was not full of thankfulness. St. Paul hardly ever writes an epistle without beginning with thankfulness. Men like Whitefield in the last century, and Bickersteth in our time, abounded in thankfulness. Oh, reader, if we would be bright and shining lights in our day, we must cherish a spirit of praise. Let our prayers be thankful prayers.

On guard

I commend to you the importance of *watchfulness* over your prayers. Prayer is that point in religion at which you must be most of all on your guard. Here it is that true religion begins; here it flourishes, and here it decays. Tell me what a man's prayers are, and I will soon tell you the state of his soul. Prayer is the spiritual pulse. By this the spiritual health may be tested. Prayer is the spiritual weather-glass. By this we may know whether it is fair or foul with our hearts. Oh, let us keep an eye continually upon our private devotions. Here is main part of our practical Christianity. Sermons, books, tracts, committee meetings, and the company of good men are all good in their way, but they will never make up for the neglect of private prayer.

Mark well the places, society, and companions that unhinge your hearts for communion with God—and make your prayers more thorough and steadfast. There be on your guard. Observe in detail what friends and what activities leave your soul in the most spiritual frame and most ready to speak with God. To these cleave and stick fast. If you will take care of your prayers, nothing shall go very wrong with your soul.

I offer these points for your private consideration. I do it in all humility. I know no one who needs to be reminded of them more than I do myself. But I believe them to be God's own truth, and I desire myself and all I love to feel them more. I want the times we live in to be praying times. I want the Christians of our day to be praying Christians. I want the church to be a praying church. My heart's desire and prayer in sending forth this booklet is to promote a spirit of prayerfulness. I want those who never prayed yet to arise and call upon God; and I want those who do pray to see that they are not praying amiss.

"Men ought always to pray."—Luke 18:1

Study Questions – Lesson 10

Counsel to the Saints, Part 2

First please read the preceding text. Always put what you have read into your own words in your answers, to indicate your understanding.

Asking

1. How is godly *boldness* in prayer different from an inappropriate familiarity?
2. a. What is *fullness* in prayer?
b. *Making It Personal* What is the longest you have ever prayed?
3. Why is being *particular* in prayer so important?
4. a. What problem hinders *intercession* in our prayers?
b. How can we remedy this problem?

Thanksgiving

5. What do we have to be *thankful* for in our prayers?

On Guard

6. Why is it extremely important that you be *watchful* over your prayers?
7. For each of the following Scriptures, write the reference and meaning of the part of the verse about counsel to the saints. *As always, use your own words in your answer. Do not just quote the verse.*
 - a. Daniel 10:12
 - b. Ephesians 6:10-13, 18
 - c. 2 Chronicles 33:10-13
 - d. Deuteronomy 4:29
 - e. Isaiah 26:8-9 Relate vs. 9 to “fullness in prayer.”
8. *Making It Personal* If you committed to praying daily while taking this course (Lesson 1, question 1), how close did you come to fulfilling that goal? How was this daily prayer beneficial?
9. *Making It Personal*
 - a. What are the main lessons you have learned during this course?
 - b. How valuable has this course been to you?