

THROUGH NIGHT TO MORNING

by

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SERMON TEN -

HOW TO PRAY

"**After this manner therefore pray ye**" (Matthew 6:9).

LUKE tells us that as JESUS was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, "**Lord, teach us to pray.**"

This disciple had heard JESUS preach, but he did not feel like saying, "Lord, teach us to preach." He could learn to preach by studying the methods of the Master. But there was something about the praying of JESUS which made the disciple feel that he did not know how to pray; that he had never prayed, and that he could not learn by listening even to the Master as He prayed.

There is a profound something about prayer which never lies on the surface. To learn it, one must go to the depths of the soul and climb to the heights of GOD. The importance of it cannot be over-estimated.

Luther's motto gives us the secret of success along all lines: "To have prayed well is to have studied well."

To have prayed well is to have preached well, to have written well, to have worked well, to have resisted well, to have lived well and to have died well. Prayer is the key to success. Not to pray is to fail. To pray aright is never to fail.

How infinitely important, then, that we should know how to pray; and CHRIST tells us how.

1. PRAY GENUINELY

"**When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are.**" The word "**hypocrite**" means primarily "*a play actor.*" In prayer, do not act a part. It is not saying a form of words in a certain posture of body. Seriousness can be simulated.

An actor can play a serious part. Earnestness can be simulated. An actor can play an earnest part. Even tears can be simulated. But there is no playing the part of genuineness. Make-believe genuineness is impossible, for genuineness has to do with the inner reality. Genuineness is character, that GOD sees, and in it there is no acting a part before GOD. He sees through all pretence. In prayer be genuine, for you are dealing with GOD. Prayer is a personal transaction

between the soul and GOD.

II. PRAY SECRETLY

"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." "When thou prayest" means literally, "Whenever thou prayest."

Let all thy praying be in thy closet with the door shut; everything and everybody shut out except GOD and you. **"Pray to thy Father which is in secret,"** and then the answer will be no secret. It will be known that GOD answers prayer.

Does this mean that I shut myself up in some private room to pray? Yes, you can do that, and ought to do it as often as possible. But entering a room and locking the door does not always mean mental privacy. A thousand things may follow and so occupy our attention that we shall not pray at all.

Our form of words will be but an actor's part. Pretending to be occupied with GOD, we are really occupied with things that distract us. And in the presence of others, even of a great congregation, the public prayer may be so occupied with GOD as to be a personal, private transaction with Him.

Even in the presence of others we may enter into the closet and shut the door to all distractions while we pray to **"[our] Father which is in secret."**

All real prayer is private, GOD the only auditor. The presence of the audience may suggest praise and petition, but the prayer is not a dealing with the audience at all, but only with GOD.

In preaching we speak to the people for GOD, and in public prayer we speak to GOD for the people. Yet no real prayer is public in the consciousness of him who prays. The actor in prayer **"[loves] to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men."**

JESUS says, **"They have their reward."** They will be seen of men, and that is all they will get. Men will call them very religious, and perhaps praise their prayers as eloquent, but GOD pays no attention to them. If they would receive from GOD, they must come to Him so filled with desire for His favour that they are oblivious to the praise or blame of men.

Prayer may be public or private, but it must always be secret in the sense that it is a personal transaction between the soul and GOD. Even if a thousand people should join in the same prayer, only those would really pray who deal personally with GOD. There are no proxies in prayer. We pray for one another, but not instead of one another. I may intercede for you, but I cannot do your praying for you. To do so would be to curse rather than to bless you.

The meaning of the Greek word translated **"closet"** is very suggestive. Its primary meaning is *"storehouse"* or *"barn,"* a place where valuables are kept. It is the word JESUS uses in Luke 12:24, when He speaks of the ravens not laying up in storehouse or barn.

It is the word "storehouse" in the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 28:8: "**The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses.**" It is the word translated "barn" in Proverbs 3:10: "**So shall thy barns be filled with plenty.**"

The idea of secrecy came out of the fact that men usually store their valuables in a secret place, and the word came to mean an inner chamber, because the wealthy often had such a secret room in their houses for the storing of valuables. "**When thou prayest,**" says JESUS, "*enter thou into thy secret treasure chamber.*"

The place of real prayer is the Christian's treasure chamber. He is there in the midst of the treasures of grace which GOD has given him, and it is there that GOD enriches him more and more; but in the secret place of the Most High where He dwells, he is rich in love, joy, peace, and all the fruit of the Spirit.

In the conservatory, where flowers and fruits are cultivated, there is no winter. The snow may fly on the outside, and cold winds may blow, but inside there is summer warmth. The place of prayer is the conservatory of the soul, lighted by Heaven's light and warmed by Heaven's warmth, and adorned with Heaven's beauty.

III. PRAY DEFINITELY

"**When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.**" "Use vain repetitions" is one word in the Greek, and means primarily "*to stammer.*"

The stammerer repeats his words in a meaningless way; and in prayer we are not to do that, GOD wants us to express our needs in a clear, intelligent manner.

Saying prayers over and over and counting our beads so as to keep account of the number of times, has no merit. That is the way the heathen do, but JESUS says, "**Be not ye therefore like unto them.**"

The heathen think they must gain their GOD's attention and make an impression upon him in behalf of their petitions. Not so our GOD, for He knows what we have need of before we ask Him. The asking is for our sakes, that our faith and love and hope may be exercised and strengthened.

IV. PRAY FRATERNALLY

"**Our Father.**" We have seen that real prayer, though public, is secret, in that it deals with GOD alone; and now it appears that even solitary prayer should be social. We are so united in family ties to all Christians that one of us cannot suffer without all suffering, and none of us can rejoice without all rejoicing. A blessing upon one is, therefore, a blessing upon all, and a curse upon one is a curse upon all.

"I," "me," and "my" do not appear in this prayer; while "we," "us" and "our" occur nine times.

The phrase "**in Heaven**" is worthy of our study. To the Jewish and Oriental mind there were three heavens.

- The first was the region of air and cloud where winds blow, thunder peals and lightnings flash.
- The second Heaven was the region of sun, moon and stars - the sidereal heavens, vaster to our vision since the telescope was invented.
- The third Heaven to which Paul was caught up, whether in the body or out of it he could not tell (II Corinthians 12:2) was the region of GOD's throne and glory, the home of the angels.

Now, "**Our Father**" is in all these heavens. He rules supreme. Astrologers taught that the stars ruled over the destinies of men: to be born under an evil star was a very bad omen; the moon struck people with madness. "**Our Father**" is the GOD of the sun, moon and stars. He is great enough to fill the infinitude of space. Because we are under His care, the sun shall not smite us by day, nor the moon by night. Sun, moon and stars are obedient servants, doing His will. "**Our Father**" also rules in the elements of air and clouds.

There is a "**Prince of the power of the air.**" He is a rebellious prince, usurping a portion of our Father's dominions; but we are not afraid of him. Wind, cloud, cold and heat, thunder and lightning are the messengers of GOD. The devout Jew listened for his Father's voice in the thunder and saw the flash of His eyes in lightning; and he was not afraid.

"GOD moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm."

V. PRAY REVERENTLY

"**Hallowed be Thy name.**" Though children, crying familiarly "**Abba, Father,**" we must not forget to be reverent. The pious Jew had such reverence for the name of Jehovah that he never pronounced it. It lost its vowel points by disuse, so that Hebrew scholars differ to-day as to how it ought to be pronounced. Let no word pass our lips which in any way takes the name of GOD in vain.

VI. PRAY LOYALLY AND HOPEFULLY

"**Thy kingdom come.**" Our Father is a King, and while we are permitted to be lovingly familiar, we must be loyally true. Disloyalty to the king is treason. The King came to earth and they rejected Him. The Church has its mission between the rejected King and the coming kingdom. At some time, perhaps soon, the King will return to set up His kingdom. It is our business to make ready for His return and welcome Him when He comes.

His kingdom has many provinces. It may be that this earth is the only province in His vast dominion of planets and stars that is in rebellion against Him. When the rebellion began in Eden centuries ago, the King might have used His power in destroying the rebels, and at any time since then He might have sent His legions of angels for their destruction or forced subjection. But His love prompted Him to another course. His purpose is to conquer by His love. He would

storm the citadel of our hearts by the power of Gethsemane and Calvary.

It is said of a great General that he expressed his purpose to destroy all his enemies; but when he had captured the opposing army he forgave them and sent them home to their families. When asked why he did not keep his word, he replied, "I have destroyed all my enemies; they are now my friends." GOD would destroy all His enemies by making them His friends, by the power of His forgiving love in JESUS CHRIST.

While we pray for the coming of the King in His glory, it is our duty and privilege to let Him come in His grace. Let us crown Him in the province of our hearts and lives. "Make JESUS King" was the telegram sent by the Japanese Christian Endeavourers to a great World's Convention, and it is ours to heed that request. "**Thy kingdom come.**"

CHRIST enthroned in every department of my being, intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical. I would crown Him in the realm of religion, business, education, politics and pleasure.

VII. PRAY SUBMISSIVELY AND AGGRESSIVELY

"**Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.**" "**Heaven**" is here singular, and evidently refers to the highest Heaven, where GOD reigns in righteousness. In Heaven the will of GOD is done perfectly and joyfully; there is no resistance. His will is law, and it is never violated. Such is the standard we should have before us, and we should be satisfied with nothing less. This spirit will make us foreign missionaries and send us with the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. It will also make us home missionaries, sending us into the alleys and avenues wherever we can find a soul in rebellion against GOD.

VIII. PRAY DEPENDENTLY

"**Give us this day our daily bread.**" "**This day,**" of course, refers to time. But the word "**daily,**" which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, has in it no thought of time. It means "needed," "necessary." "Give us daily the food that is necessary for us, not only in quantity, but also in quality." It is a prayer that we may have the wisdom to eat the right kind of food, in the right way, at the right time. More people are hurt by gormandizing than by fasting.

- The day labourer can pray this prayer, for a certain kind of food is necessary for the strengthening of his body for his manual toil.
- The writer, who sits at his desk, should pray this prayer, for he needs another kind of food for his nerves and brain.
- The millionaire can pray this prayer, for he needs wisdom that he may eat just the food he needs.

While a certain millionaire was in poor health, it is said that he carried with him in his travels a specialist, to tell him what proportion of milk and biscuits he should eat. His millions could furnish an abundance of food, but special wisdom was required as to quality and quantity.

This prayer is, therefore, as appropriate for the man with a large bank account as for the man who walks the street not knowing where his next meal is to come from. It is also a prayer for the

housekeeper and the cook, that they may have skill and wisdom in selecting and preparing the food that is necessary for the family.

IX. PRAY PENITENTLY

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." The word translated "**debt**" means "that which is justly or legally due." An overdue obligation is a sin.

It is not a sin to borrow or give your note promising to pay at a certain time. We really "**owe no man anything**" until the time for payment has arrived. But the moment an obligation becomes due we must pay it, or ask forgiveness of the creditor.

To let an obligation run on unadjusted is to live in sin. This applies to rent, grocer's bills, millinery bills, and all other debts of individuals or Churches. To neglect or refuse to pay a debt that is due is a sin to be confessed to the creditor.

Our sins against GOD are all debts overdue, and we are bankrupt. We owe ten thousand talents and have not a penny to pay. It is a debt to the justice of GOD; and the love of GOD in JESUS CHRIST makes full payment for all who will confess their sins and gratefully accept the payment.

X. PRAY CAUTIOUSLY

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil [the Evil One]." We should make no spectacular display of courage. "A fence at the top of the precipice is better than a hospital at the bottom." We should keep as far from danger as possible.

Better use our strength in doing good than in resisting evil. But if, with all our caution, we fall into the snare of the devil and are caught in the meshes of his wiles, there is One able to deliver. Call to Him and He will come to your rescue. He will make a way of escape.

Let us close where we began. **"Lord, teach us to pray."** Not how to pray, though, as we have seen, He does teach us how. Nor what to pray, though He does teach us what. We know how to pray and what to pray better than we pray. **"Lord, teach us to PRAY."**

We are tempted to let other good things displace prayer: hours, days and weeks for other things, and only minutes for prayer. Knowing how and what is not sufficient. We must take time to do it, for GOD works in answer to prayer, and GOD at work is our greatest need.

~ end of chapter 10 ~
