

The Science of Prayer

Its ABC's

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Name: _____

Date: _____

Lesson 6:

Seven Humble Conditions to Answered Prayer

Introduction

Not long after my wife and I began to discover the science of prayer, we had an unforgettable experience. We were with some close friends who were themselves seeking to learn the science of prayer.

On the Lord's holy day we attended divine worship with them. Our custom is to seek earnestly God's Holy Spirit as we enter the presence of the Lord. We ask Him to feed our hungry souls.

Although the speaker of the morning was perhaps not the most interesting, we received four distinct blessings during his sermon. But as we left the sanctuary, our young friend began to criticize the service, the speaker, and the sermon.

We listened a while in silence. Then ventured to ask him a question. "When you entered the sanctuary this morning, did you ask God to feed your hungry soul?" A puzzled expression was reflected on his face as he replied, "Why, no." But in another instant he understood the meaning of the question. We explained to him. "This is why you did not receive a blessing. We received four specific blessings today, because we felt our need."

Dear student, there are at least seven "humble" conditions to answered prayer. May we suggest that you, with us, consider each one personally as we study together.

1. Humility feels its need: it is a condition to prayer answers.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6.

"I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." Isaiah 44:3.

"He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." Luke 1:53.

2. Humility leaves the "how" and "When" to God: it is a condition to answered prayer.

"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known." Isaiah 42:16.

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"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."
Jeremiah 33:3.

As an illustration of letting God answer our prayers His way, we mention the couple who asked God to fulfill the promise of Philippians 4:19, which says, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." This text definitely promises us our need. We have a right through Christ to ask that our need be met.

But this conscientious couple not only asked that their need be met, but also they specified how that need must be met. They not only prayed for a house (which was their need) but also told God which house to give them, its location, and all. The promise does not say, "I will give you a house on the very street you specify."

It does not say, "I will give you a house on the very road you name." It only promises to supply our need. We need a house. But trust in God will let Him decide which house. We may find a house on Main Street. We may also discover there is a house out on Roseberry Lane.

We have a perfect right, we emphasize, to ask God to supply our need. But since "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him," (Matthew 6:8), we are to let Him make the choice for us.

When the couple learned that they had gone too far in their prayer request, they repented. They told God they would let Him choose which house they needed. And immediately God gave them the very house they thought was best.

Another illustration of this condition to answered prayer is that of claiming a promise for the salvation of some soul. In 1 John 5:16 God definitely promises life to the dear child of God who has lost his way, that is, if we pray believingly and fulfill the conditions. But a young man who decided that the very soul for whom he prayed must be converted that very day went beyond the promise.

There is no Bible promise that a person will accept Christ the very day we choose.

God knows the heart of the one for whom we pray. God knows how to weave influences around that life which will result in that dear one choosing the victory He offers. It may take longer than we would choose. We would do much better not to try to compel God to force this one to accept Him by bringing it about the day we decide.

Repeatedly dear saints of God come to us excitedly. They tell us they have asked, believed, and thanked God that a certain dear one would be at a specific meeting we are holding. They think they have every assurance this loved one will be present at that very hour. They are tremendously disappointed if it does not take place. They have overlooked the fact that there is no promise in the Bible that people will attend a specific church service at the specific hour we choose.

May we emphasize-we have every right in the world to claim salvation for any tempted tried member of the body of Christ. But when we ask for something which the Lord has never promised, we must change our prayer. It should then be, not a prayer of reception, but one of commitment. It should then go something like this:

"Dear Lord, You have promised me in 1 John 5:16 that You will save John Doe. I ask believingly. I claim triumphantly. I thank you I have received. Now, dear Lord, if it be Your will according to circumstances and the heart of John Doe, may he also attend the meeting to be held in the church at 3:30 P.M. today. In Jesus' name. Amen."

The part that claims the promise is a prayer of reception. The part which goes beyond the promise must be a prayer of commitment.

In this connection another important fact is essential, having to do with God's priorities. God has promised us eternal life. 1 John 2:25. We have a right to ask, believe and thank Him we have received eternal life. But the same God promises that the only way patience can be developed is through suffering, trials, tribulations. (See Isaiah 48:10; James 1:2, 3; Romans 5:3, 4; Revelation 14:12.)

To claim eternal life is within the area of a prayer of reception. But to pray for eternal life with no sufferings, no problems, no trials in the present life is wrong. It ignores the necessity of experiences in life which help to develop firmness of character, patience, and longsuffering, etc. So to pray that we will have no trials is to pray contrary to the Word of God.

However, we have a right to pray for strength to bear these trials--for grace to overcome. This is in accordance with the Word of God. We may ask. We may believe. We may thank God we have received. This is part of the science of prayer. (See Jude 24; Philippians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 10:13.)

3. Humility asks for the gift of a forgiving spirit.

A forgiving spirit is a condition to answered prayer. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." Mark 11:24, 25.

A forgiving spirit is also a promised gift. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Ezekiel 36:26.

It is important to learn just how God gives us this new spirit of forgiveness. "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Ezekiel 36:27.

The Holy Spirit makes clear on what basis He will give us this new attitude--this spirit of forgiveness. "We ... beholding ... are changed into the same image ... by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Follow carefully, dear student, the principle. It is this: We immediately cease to think about what unfair advantage that person took of us, and fix the mind on what Jesus did for us on Calvary. Let us put it again this way: instead of thinking of how we do not deserve what this person did to us, we will think on how we do not deserve what Jesus did for us on a hill called Golgotha.

Many years ago we were in a great trouble. We went out alone in the woods and sobbed out our self-pity. We were thinking on the injustice a few people had heaped on us. The more we brooded over what they had done, the weaker we became, and the less forgiving we were. Then the Holy Spirit flashed into our minds this text: "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Hebrews 12:3.

Foggily we turned to think of Jesus before Pilate and Herod. Our eyes were so filled with the clouds of self-pity we could scarcely see Jesus even in our imagination. But we forced ourselves to do what the Scripture commanded. And as the outline of our dear Lord became clearer and clearer, the bitterness vanished. Forgiveness took its place.

Let us never forget that while the spirit that forgives our enemies is a condition, it is also a free gift. It is ours if we will take our eyes off the problem and place them on the solution--the love of Christ for us who are ourselves so unworthy.

4. Humility seeks answers so we can share with others too.

It is not selfish to pray for our daily bread. "Give us this day our daily bread." Matthew 6:11. It is not selfish to ask for our needs. "But my God shall supply all your need." Philippians 4:19. God is exceeding willing to give extra blessings when we ask to share with others.

"Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him . . . I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Luke 11:5-9.

He who seeks answers for selfish reasons may not receive all he asks for: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." James 4:3.

In our ministry we have traced repeatedly the rich rewards we have received when sharing unselfishly with others. Pages could be written to picture these tremendous rewards. When we have asked that we might share the cup of blessing with others, God caused it to overflow. Its blessings splashed all over us with showers of blessings.

5. Humility does not have a holier-than-thou attitude.

A holier-than-thou attitude is a smoke in our Lord's nostrils: "A people ... which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou ... are a smoke in my nose." Isaiah 65:3, 5.

Those who take the attitude that others must sin the way they sin or else stop sinning, cannot expect God to smell their rancid prayers. In all prayer groups we steer away from criticism of others.

6. Humility prays in the name and merits of Christ.

". . . that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." John 15:16.

When King Hezekiah prayed for healing, he made the mistake of telling God how much good he had done. His restored health was a curse to himself and his posterity. (See 2 Kings, chapter 20.)

7. Humility does not take credit that belongs to God.

"And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Psalm 50:15.

Did you ever think of humility as being just plain honesty? Let us take this case: A man is in trouble. He is helpless. He cannot find a way out. Then he asks God to come to his rescue. God does. God helps him out.

Then friends come along. They praise this man for the wonderful wisdom he showed in his trying circumstances. The man accepts this flattery. He never tells them that he did not have the wisdom. That he did not have the answers. That it was in utter helplessness that he sought God. And that the whole solution came from God.

So his lack of humility was plain dishonesty. He did not deserve the credit his friends heaped upon him. He yielded to their flattery. He knew it was only God's love, power, and wisdom that saved the day. But he wanted his friends to think that it came from himself.

When men take credit for what they did not accomplish, it is dishonesty. Pride is dishonesty. Humility is honesty. It is merely telling others the truth of the matter. Humility says, "I was in trouble. I was helpless. I knew no way out. I prayed. God answered. I deserve no credit whatsoever. It all belongs to God."

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Can you imagine then, people turning to him and exclaiming, "You are so very humble!" If such were the case he should reply, "No, I am just plain honest. I have told you exactly as it is. It was God alone who did the deed. He alone saved the day. He alone gave the solution."

"Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." Psalms 4:6

A PERSONAL MESSAGE:

Dear Student:

The lesson you have just finished has to do with humility. We have learned that when we let the Holy Spirit garb us with humility, something happens. And when we add to this freedom of choice for John Doe, something more wonderful takes place. These two secrets--choice and humility--are Bible laws of human ease.

We should graciously give John Doe perfect freedom, without trying to tell him, to educate him, to preach at him, or nag him. This obeys the law of choice. We obey the law of humility by not belittling John Doe. This adds to his feeling of security in our presence.

Jesus made clear that when a person chooses to come to Him and learns of His humility, he will find rest. He said in effect, if you choose to come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden.... if you choose to learn of My humility--you will find rest to your souls. You will be at ease. (See Matthew 11:28-30.)

If we speak one belittling remark of, or to, John Doe, we are breaking the law of humility. If we try to tell him what to do without his wanting to know, we break the law of choice. When we break either or both of these laws of life, John is turned off by our conversation. Kindly check yourself. See if any individual around you says in effect, you may come to see me but leave your religion at home. If so you may know that you are without doubt forgetting these two secrets--choice and humility.

How then shall John Doe be convicted of his sins and turn to the Lord? The Holy Spirit is promised as a reprover of sin. (See John 16:8.) When we stop nagging John Doe, and when we cease to belittle him, the Holy Spirit's voice can get through to him. Then he will be more liable to recognize the conviction as divine and will be more likely to surrender to the Lord. Our part is to be a witness, not a judge.

Cordially yours,

Glenn Coon, Sr. Glenn Coon, Jr.

QUIZ ON LESSON 6:

1. If we would find answers to our prayers we must _____ and thirst after righteousness. Matthew 5:6.
2. God often answers in a way we know _____ Jeremiah 33:3.
3. Can we expect wonderful answers to our prayers if we refuse to forgive others? _____
4. Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your _____. James 4:3.
5. A people with a holier-than-thou attitude are a _____ in God's nose. Isaiah 65:3, 5.
6. We are to ask in the name and merits of _____ John 15:16.
7. When God answers our prayers are we to give self, or God, the credit? _____

Correct Answers on Answer Sheet.