

Ten Essentials to get Answers to Prayer

By Meade MacGuire

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Matthew 7

⁷ Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.

⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds;
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Basics of Prayer

So much is said and written on the subject of real prayer that it seems impossible to say anything new. Yet there is the danger in this, as in other vital subjects, of overlooking elementary truths. Many doubtless attempt to apply the advanced lessons and experiences in the Christian life without having first learned the elementary ones; and failure and discouragement are the result.

Christian experience is a school that takes the beginner in the first grade and leads him up through primary school, high school, college, and university. The Bible is the textbook, and it contains the lessons for every grade. Much of the failure comes from primary students either having no ambition to advance beyond their present attainment or endeavoring to master the lessons in the college grades before having laid a good foundation in the lower grades.

To make the illustration concrete: Moses was called of God to do a great work, which required a Christian experience corresponding to a university education. He attempted it while yet in the primary grades, and failed. Forty years in the wilderness solitude caring for the sheep, was the university course in humility, meekness, care for the weak, and communion with the unseen but ever-present God, which fitted him for as great responsibilities as were ever borne by man.

It is of the utmost importance to learn the simple essentials

necessary to an ever-deepening and enlarging prayer life. How often we hear the remark from some discouraged church member:

“My prayers do not seem to do any good; I feel as if they do not go higher than my head.”

The sad part of it is that they are probably right, for there is no little truth in the old fable of the church building, which, on being torn down, revealed a great quantity of prayers up under the rafters—prayers which had never got through the roof!

Pray!

One who studies the Scriptures on the subject must conclude that no man will be saved who does not pray. On the other hand, if he listens to the prayers of others, he can hardly fail to observe that many reveal an ignorance of the simplest principles laid down in the Scriptures as the basis of prevailing prayer. We shall take up in order and examine some of these principles.

1. Renounce Sin

The only prayer an unregenerate man can consistently pray is a prayer for pardon. When uttered in sincerity, “God be merciful to me a sinner” will always reach the ear of our Father in heaven. But that prayer, and every other petition, must come from a heart ready and willing to acknowledge and put away every known sin.

Psalm 66

¹⁸ If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

Isaiah 59

² Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.

Proverbs 28

⁹ He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his

prayer shall be abomination.

God makes no promise to hear or to answer the prayer of one who cherishes evil or refuses forever to renounce every known sin.

2. Obey God

Nor is it enough to turn from sin. That is only the negative side of God's requirement. To see the true hatefulness of sin and long to be delivered from it means to see the true desirability of holiness, to hunger and thirst for it, and to choose to walk therein. Then God can safely answer prayer.

1 John 3

²² And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

3. Forgive Others

The disciples asked Christ to teach them to pray. In the model prayer (*Matthew* 6:5-13) He gave them there are three simple, definite petitions:

1. Give us this day our daily bread.
2. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
3. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

The only comment Christ made regarding this prayer is:

Matthew 6

¹⁴ For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

¹⁵ But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

4. Right motive

James 4 [Weymouth]

³ You have not because you do not pray; or pray and, yet do not receive, because you pray wrongly, your object being to

waste what you get on some pleasure or another.

All selfishness in the heart tends to ruin and death; and therefore God could not consistently respond to a prayer whose motive is selfish. If one's petitions are not granted, one may well examine with the greatest care the motives that prompt them, for prayers made in harmony with God's will cannot fail of fulfillment.

5. Ask

These scriptures make it very plain that we are to make requests of God.

Matthew 7

⁷ Ask, and it shall be given you.

Matthew 21

²¹ Verily I say unto you, If you have faith, and doubt not, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you shall say unto this mountain, Be removed, and be cast into the sea; it shall be done.

²² And all things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.

John 16

²³ Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.

In some respects our receiving is definitely limited by our asking.

James 4

² You have not, because you ask not.

6. Ask in Faith

It is also made plain that there is a right way and a wrong way to ask.

James 1 [Weymouth]

⁶ But let him ask in faith and have no doubts; for he who has doubts is like the surge of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed into spray.

⁷ A person of that sort must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

To ask in faith is not to expect the answer but to accept the answer.

Mark 2

²⁴ What things soever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them.

7. Submit to God

Ask according to God's will.

1 John 5

¹⁴ If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

In the Scriptures God has expressed His will regarding many things, and has given definite promises, which we may claim with no reservation when we have met the conditions. But when our requests are not covered by a definite promise, we are to ask Him to grant our petition or withhold the answer as He may see best. This is in harmony with the prayer of our Saviour:

Luke 22

⁴² Father, if You be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.

8. Ask in the Name of Jesus

Here is doubtless the supreme condition of great achievement in prayer.

John 16

²³ Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.

²⁴ Hitherto have you asked nothing in My name: ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.

Not that the mere form, or saying the words, "in the name of Jesus," has any particular virtue. It is the clear realization that we deserve nothing, but that Christ, who stands at the right hand of the throne of God as our Mediator and represen-

tative, merits everything, and He has given us permission and urges us to use His name.

9. Be Definite

How many wandering, indefinite, pointless prayers there are! We can never hope to prevail, to remove mountains, to achieve the mighty victories of faith, by repeating a prayer that has become a mere form or that lacks a definite aim.

Mark 11

²⁴ What things soever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them.

Real prayer expresses the most intense desire and longing of the soul.

10. Persevere

It is the preceding element of definiteness, leading to the holy determination to realize God's promises, which takes no denial. No one persists long in wandering petitions which have back of them no intense, passionate desire and purpose.

Christ gives a striking illustration of the importance of perseverance on behalf of others:

Luke 11

⁵ And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

⁶ For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?

⁷ And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.

⁸ I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

He then followed the story with the threefold injunction:

⁹ I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you

shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

And in *Luke* 18 is given a similar lesson emphasizing the necessity of perseverance in prayer for one's own personal needs:

Luke 18

¹ And he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

² Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:

³ And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

⁴ And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;

⁵ Yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

⁶ And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge said.

⁷ And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

⁸ I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?

There is much more to learn about successful prayer, but these ten suggestions will help one who puts them into practice to find the way into the life of real prayer.