

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **MOTIVATIONAL LESSONS “The Power of Persistent Prayer”**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Men ought to pray always, and never lose heart” (Lk. 18:1). In this passage, Jesus teaches us about the power of prayer in our Christian lives. Ask yourself today, “How often do we really use prayer?” Do we see prayer as a powerful tool that is able to help us through this life? Do we use the power of prayer in the everyday struggles that we face? We talk about prayer. And I believe that we really do understand what the Bible says about prayer. But do we really use prayer as God wants us to? If we are going to make it through this life and go to Heaven, and if we are going to defeat the devil and all the fiery darts that he throws at us, we must realize the power of persistent prayer. And we must take advantage of every opportunity serve God, using prayer as a tool to help us do that. Christians must realize exactly how important prayer is in their lives. The text of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 teaches us to “pray without ceasing.” That text does not mean that everything in our life is a prayer. But it does mean that there should never be a time in our lives when we cannot come to the throne of God and ask Him for help. I think of Matthew 14:23. In this context, Jesus had gone away from the multitudes, and had gone up to the mountain by Himself to pray. Jesus realized the importance of prayer in His personal ministry. He realized the power of prayer, for it says in Matthew 26:53 that He could pray and that God would send angels to help Him in His time of need. We need to realize how important prayer is in helping us overcome the difficulties that we face in life. Notice what James said about prayer. In James 5:16, we have these words recorded: “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” The idea of “effective and fervent” carries with it the idea of continual petitioning of the throne of God. That type of prayer, James teaches us, overcomes much in this life. But to really understand the power of prayer, we need to know about some of the prerequisites of prayer. We need to know **how** to pray. We need to understand what the Bible says about prayer, and that there are conditions that we must meet in order to pray properly. The Bible does teach us that there are certain prerequisites to prayer. There are some things that we need to understand ahead of time if we are going to pray as God wants us to.

For example, not every person can simply stand up to pray and say whatever he wants to say. A person needs to be taught how to pray according to the Scriptures. In Luke 11:1, the disciples of Jesus came to Him with this request: “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples to pray.” Oh, how we today need the same attitude that Jesus’ disciples had. We need to want to learn how to pray according to the Scriptures. We need to learn to pray biblically! We must not pray selfishly, but instead we need to pray as God would have us to pray.

Another prerequisite to prayer is that we must pray with the firm belief that God will hear our prayers. Think of the words of Mark 11:24 as they relate to prayer. Jesus said, “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them,

and you will have them.” Jesus did not teach us to wish that we receive the things for which we pray, or to simply “guess” that we will receive them. Rather, Jesus said that when we pray we need to believe that our prayers will be answered, and then trust in God to answer them. In Matthew 21:22, Jesus said, “Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” Remember the words of James 1:5? We told, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” James tells us that we are not to ask like a double-minded man, since he is unstable in all his ways. We need to have a firm conviction in God’s ability to hear our prayer and to bless us if we ask according to His will.

This, then, leads us to a third prerequisite to prayer. We must pray according to the will of God. We do not need to pray merely for what **we** want, or what **we** think we ought to receive. Rather, first and foremost we need to pray according to God’s will. How would God have us to pray? In 1 John 5:14, John discusses praying according to the will of God when he said, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” We do not need to be asking for a million dollars. We do not need to pray for worldly things just to make us happy. We need to pray according to the will of God. How wonderful it is to hear someone pray, “Lord, if this is Your will, let it be.” That is the attitude our Lord possessed in Matthew 27:46 when He said, “Not My will, but Yours be done.”

Another important prerequisite to prayer is that the person who is praying must have a very humble attitude. In Luke 14:11, Jesus said, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Think about Luke 18:9ff. Two different men go to the temple to worship. One is a religious man. He comes to the temple, and begins to pray by saying, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I give tithes of all that I possess” (vss. 11-12). He was concerned about himself, and he was praying selfishly. But the second man, a sinner, says simply, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” That man prayed in humility, and that was the man whom Jesus commended.

Another prerequisite of prayer is that we must pray with the spirit and with the understanding. We cannot merely say words. Instead, we must pray by using our spirit and our emotions. We also have to pray with the understanding of what is being said. In 1 Corinthians 14:15, Paul said, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding.” Praying with the understanding means that we must think carefully about what we so to God.

Another important prerequisite to prayer is that we must be right with God. We cannot expect God to hear our prayers if our lives are not being lived properly. In Psalm 66:18 we are told, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.” If there is sin that we are trying to hide, or if there are things in our lives that we know are not right and that we have not taken care of, we cannot expect God to hear our prayers. We know from John 9:31 that “God hears not the prayers of sinners.” The blind man in that passage was right. If we are living in sin, we need not even pray until we get the sin out of our lives. Then, we need to pray to ask God for forgiveness. The writers of Proverbs said in Proverbs 28:9, “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.” God is not going to hear our prayer if we do not listen to and follow His will. Thus, a prerequisite to prayer is for us to have our live right with God. We must not live in sin, but we must instead “walk in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7).

The Bible also sets out for us a practical plan for prayer. God, in Scripture, gives us a good plan to follow as we pray. It sets some guidelines for us to use. For example, prayer ought to be the very first thing we do each morning. Jesus did this, so it is no wonder that His

life was as powerful as it was, and it is no wonder that He was able to do so many great things. Yes, He was deity. But He also realized the power of prayer. Notice the words of Mark 1:35, where the Bible says, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” Notice that Christ prayed first thing in the morning. He had “risen a long while before daylight.” Jesus got up early in the day and went out to a solitary place to pray. He wanted to be alone so that things of the world would not get in the way. Then, He could talk to God, petition His throne, and ask for help. So, every morning when you start off your day, start it by praying to God.

Prayer also ought to be a private matter between a person and God. There is a private essence to prayer. In Matthew 6, Jesus told us not to be like those hypocrites who stand on street corners so that they can be heard by man. Instead, Jesus told us that when we pray we should go into an inner room or closet in our house, and there get down on our knees to pray to God. Prayer is a private matter. There are certain things that we need to discuss with God that should remain between us and God alone. The practical plan for prayer that is set out in Scripture says that we should pray morning, noon, and evening. In Psalm 55:17, the psalmist said, “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud.” These are not the only times we can pray, of course. But we certainly ought to use these opportunities. We should start off our day with prayer. Then, somewhere in the middle of the day we ought to take the time to stop and pray to God. Before the close of the day, we ought to thank God for the blessings of the day, ask forgiveness for anything we have done wrong, and pray that He will take care of us through the night and see us through another day in the morning.

Another practical plan for prayer is that prayer should be continual. Acts 2:42 teaches us that “they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” These first-century Christians continued daily in prayer. We today ought to have a continual lifestyle of prayer. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, this is the real idea—“pray without ceasing.” We must have a **continual** prayer life so that there is never a time in our life when we cannot approach the throne of God. Paul put it this way in Colossians 4:2—“Continue earnestly in prayer.” Our lives ought to be such that there is never a time when we cannot pray to God to ask Him for His help.

Another wonderful teaching about prayer is that prayer should become a good habit for us. There is nothing wrong with habits, in and of themselves. Prayer ought to be made a good habit. Listen to the words of Daniel 6:10, and notice the habit that Daniel had. The Bible says that the king had signed a decree that whenever the people heard a certain sound, they were to pray toward an image that he had set up. Daniel 6:10 says, “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.” Daniel had been trained to pray. It was “his custom”—a good habit that he had developed. Prayer should be a good habit in our lives. Parents have the awesome responsibility of instilling this habit in their children's lives. They are to teach them to pray morning, noon, and night. They are to help them learn the real value of prayer so that they can receive the strength that comes from prayer.

The Bible also gives us a prescription for proper prayer. God tell us in His Word about things for which we ought to pray, and things that ought to be included in our prayers when we approach His throne. There are some specific things that we ought to mention each time we pray. For example, we ought to pray for the lost. Jesus taught us this in Matthew 9:36-38, where the Bible says,

“But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’”

Jesus told His disciples that they needed to pray for those who were lost so that God would send out workers and that the lost could therefore receive the message of salvation. Oh, how wonderful it is to pray, not just for those who are physically sick, but also for those who are spiritually ill and who are lost in sin, so that God will find a way to use us to reach them so that they might be saved.

When we approach the throne of God in prayer, we also ought to pray to overcome temptation. The Bible says in Luke 18:1 that we ought to “pray always, and never lose heart.” Jesus is teaching us there that when we face struggles, or when we are discouraged, we need to look up to the throne of God and ask Him for help during our time of need. This is something we see in the life of Jesus in Matthew 26:36 where Jesus went and prayed. We learn in Luke 22, in the account of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, that Jesus told His disciples, “Stay here while I go and pray.” Jesus prayed to the Father, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Not My will, but Yours be done.” Thus, we learn that in time of temptation, or in times when we are faced with sin, we should pray. When we are struggling with sin in our lives, what is one of the most important things we can do? We can ask God to help us. The Bible says in 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” Tell God about your problems and your sins. Ask Him for help in the struggles that you face, and know that God will hear and help you.

Christians ought to also pray for the forgiveness of their sins. This is something for which we ought to pray on a regular basis. As we think about this, I am reminded of the example of Simon the sorcerer. He has just obeyed the Gospel (Acts 8). He has been told that he now finds himself in sin because he tried to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit with money. He is told by Peter, “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (vs. 22). Simon said, “Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me” (vs. 24). After we have become a child of God, we can approach the throne of God when sin enters into our life. We can repent of that sin, approach His throne, and ask God for forgiveness of those sins. If we have things in our life that are sinful, and for which we have repented, then we need to ask God for forgiveness of those sins.

We ought to pray for those who are erring and who are in sin. The text of 1 John 5:16 teaches us to pray for a fellow Christian who is in error and who is not living the life that he or she ought to be living because of living in sin and disobeying God’s will.

When we pray to God, we also ought to pray for wisdom. James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

We ought to pray for the necessities of life. Philippians 4:6 teaches us, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” When we need the necessities of life, we need to ask God for His help, knowing that He will help us.

We ought to pray for the leaders of nations. The Bible teaches us in 1 Timothy 2:2-4 that we ought to pray for kings, leaders, and all who are in places of authority, “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” We ought to pray for world leaders. But what should we pray? First and foremost, we ought to pray that they will come to an understanding of God’s will and obey the Gospel so that they will live their lives according to the Scripture and so that they will rule by the greatest law that has ever been given—the law of Almighty God.

So, yes, there are things for which we should pray when we approach God's throne. But today we need to realize just how powerful prayer really is. I think that we sometimes do not pray as often as we should because we diminish the power of prayer. Imagine the power of prayer as being such that we can take our requests to the very throne of the Creator of the Universe! He tells us that if we ask in faith, believing, then He will bless us if our petitions are according to His will. Think about what James said in James 5:16 when he wrote, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." In the context of James 5, right before James makes this statement, he reminds us of Elijah, who was a great man of prayer. James said that Elijah prayed that it would not rain, and it did not. He prayed that it would rain, and it did rain. Elijah petitioned the throne of God and asked God to not allow it to rain—and it did not rain. He then prayed again for it to rain, and it did rain. God heard his request, and Elijah was able to have power through his prayer. Today, we can have powerful results because of our prayers. Imagine having direct communication with the Creator of the Universe. God has promised us that He will hear us, that He will care for us, that He will be attuned to our needs, and that He will help us if we will but ask. Oh, how we ought to realize just how powerful prayer is in our lives today.

But as we think about prayer, there are some false beliefs about prayer that need to be addressed. There are some beliefs that we see among us today that are simply not true. Some believe that "just praying for the lost" will save those who are lost. But that is not true. We can pray all day long for the lost, but until we are willing to combine action with our prayers and teach those people whom we are know are lost (by possibly giving them a tract, a CD, or something else to help them learn the Bible, or by inviting them to have a Bible study with us), they are not going to be saved. Prayer alone will not do that. Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Then, He told us, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19-20). In Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas were in prison. They were praying and singing hymns, and the prisoners were listening to them. Yes, they heard their prayers. But they also would have to have heard the message of salvation in order to be saved. Paul had a prayer. In Romans 10:1, he said, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved." Did he combine that prayer with action? He certainly did! Paul traveled widely, preaching the Gospel and telling his own countrymen about salvation. He did not just pray. He prayed that it would happen, and then he got busy telling others about the Gospel.

Another false belief about prayer is that prayer alone will provide the necessities of life. Some believe that all we have to do is pray, and that everything will be taken care of. Yes, we believe in the power of prayer. But we believe that praying for the necessities of life also means that we have to do our part as well. Yes, God hears our prayers, and He is willing to bless us. But we must get busy to do the best we can in order to receive those blessings. It is like this. Imagine that you need a job, but you simply sit on the couch and wait for someone to come say to you, "I think I would like to hire you." That is not the way it works. People who pray for jobs should get out and put in applications at places that are hiring so that they can get a job. People who pray for food should not sit at the kitchen table, hoping that a plate of food will somehow appear in front of them. People who pray for food get out and work for a living in order to provide for themselves. Yes, God will help them by providing them with a job. But they must do the work to receive that blessing. We are told in Matthew 6:33 that we must "seek first the kingdom." We have to do the seeking. Paul said in Philippians 4:19, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Yes, God will supply. But He does not expect us to simply sit around and allow Him to do all the work. We must combine our prayer with action.

Then there is another false belief about prayer. It suggests that all a person has to do to be saved is to “say the sinner’s prayer. I want us to think about that for just a moment. It is a very popular idea among many religious people today. They will say that all we have to do to be saved is to recite a prayer that says something like, “Jesus, I believe that you are my Savior, and I welcome you into my heart.” Then, somehow, they are saved. But let’s think about that biblically. The first question is, “Where is the sinner’s prayer found in the Bible?” Where in Scripture do we find the prayer that we have often heard among religious people? Listen very carefully. You can study the New Testament from Matthew through Revelation, and you will not find the sinner’s prayer that is used by so many people today. It is just not in the Scriptures. Yes, we find examples of people praying. But when it comes to salvation, they had to do things according to God’s will as well. Think about the example of Saul of Tarsus. He is on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. A bright line shines upon him, and he hears the voice of Jesus saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Upon hearing that, Saul cries out, “Lord, Who are You?” The Lord says, “I am Jesus, Who you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Saul responded by asking, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” He was told to go into the city and there it would be told him what he needed to do. Here is the only example we have of anything even close to a “sinner’s prayer”—but it did not save Saul. Ananias is told in Acts 9:11-12 to go to Damascus to a street called Straight, where he would find Saul of Tarsus who had been waiting for three days, praying. Here was a man (Saul) who was praying, and who had been waiting for Ananias three days and three nights. Yet he still had to **do** something to be saved. If there was ever an example of a sinner’s prayer that would have saved someone, surely it would have been the prayer of Saul. But the Bible tells us that Saul had to do more than merely pray. He heard the Word. He believed in Jesus. He was willing to repent and make changes in his life. Acts 22:16 then tells us that after Saul had already been praying, Ananias said to him, “Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Yes, Saul prayed. But that was not when he was saved. Saul had to be baptized in order to have sins washed away. Many today are being duped into thinking that simply mouthing a prayer that some religious person has thought up will save them. But there is no such “sinner’s prayer” to be found within the pages of the New Testament. And, the example of Saul shows us that even though he was praying, he was not saved until he obeyed God in baptism.

The same thing is true in our lives today. If we are going to be saved, it is not going to be by prayer alone. We must **do** what God says in order to be pleasing to Him. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21—“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven.” There is something that we must **do**. Jesus condemned the Pharisees when He asked, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Lk. 6:46). So, what must you do in order to be saved? First, you must hear God’s Word. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Once you have listened to the voice of God through Scripture, then you must believe in Jesus. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Yes, we must believe. But belief alone will not save us. James 2:24 says, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” You also have to repent of your sins. In Luke 13:3, Jesus said, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” You must confess Jesus as the Son of God as seen in Romans 10:10. And, yes, you must be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk. 16:16).

Today our prayer for you is that you will obey the Gospel if you are not a Christian. If, as a Christian, you have not been utilizing prayer as you should in your life, why not revitalize and renew your prayer life, and strive every day to be a prayerful person? May God help us as we strive to do His will.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE POWER OF PERSISTENT PRAYER”**

1. In Luke 18:1, what did Jesus say that men should do?
2. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, what did the apostle Paul command Christians to do?
3. According to James 5:16, what power does the prayer of a righteous person have?
4. In Luke 11:1, what request did Christ's disciples make of Him?
5. In Mark 11:24, what did Jesus have to say to us about prayer?
6. In Matthew 21:22, what did Jesus have to say to us about prayer?
7. For what, according to James 1:5, do we have the right to pray to God?
8. How, according to 1 John 5:14, are we to pray to God?
9. What was Jesus' attitude in Matthew 27:46 when He prayed to God?
10. With what attitude, according to Luke 14:11, should we pray to God?
11. What two different attitudes did the men described in Luke 18:9ff. express?
12. Which one of the two men in Luke 18:9ff. “went away justified”?
13. What does Psalm 66:18 teach us about prayer?
14. What does John 9:31 teach us about prayer?
15. According to Proverbs 28:9, what is the connection between our obedience to God and our prayers to God?
16. What did Paul mean in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 when he said that we should “pray without ceasing”?
17. What are at least two important lessons that we can learn about prayer from Daniel 6:10?
18. What does 1 Peter 5:7 admonish us to do?
19. How do we carry out the command of 1 Peter 5:7?
20. According to the teaching of James 5:16, what is one proper use of prayer for Christians?
21. Where in the New Testament do we find “the sinner's prayer”?
22. What did Ananias command Saul to do to be saved (Acts 22:16)?