



JESUS TEACHES US...

LESSON TWO: To pray

For many Christians, prayer doesn't come easily; it's a struggle to concentrate our minds when they are full of so many things. In our private prayers we often start and have hardly begun when our mind wanders to what we've planned for the day or what we have already done; what has gone wrong and did I remember to..... In fact, our thoughts seem to run riot when we decide to pray more than at any other time. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to *pray without ceasing*. How you might ask, does one get any near to fulfilling this?

We often say children learn by example, they see what their parents do and try to do likewise. Whether we are a young Christian or have followed the Lord for many years, we should look to the example set by Jesus.

Read: Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46 and Luke 6:12.

In each of these verses Jesus is setting us an example. We don't have to climb a mountain, but we do need a place where we can be free of distractions. When we fall in love, we want to spend time talking with that person so that we can better understand them. In the same way, if we want to know Jesus and his love, mercy, and grace in our lives, then we need to get to know him.

Obviously, we can learn a lot about him by reading the scriptures but it possible to come closer to him when we pray. There is a story told about Mother Theresa. A young man came to visit her and to ask how he could work for Jesus as she did. She asked if he knew Jesus. He told her all about what he had learned and what he had done. She listened and then asked: "*But do you know him?*". Again, he told her what he had learned and again she came back to the question, "*But do you know him? Do you really know him?*"

We can learn about Jesus and what he did from the scriptures, but we can only come close to him and know him intimately if we spend time with him. That time doesn't mean a long shopping list on our part! It is so easy to get into the habit of asking for things, often legitimate requests, that we never stop and listen to hear if Jesus has something to say to us.

“After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone.” (Matthew 14:23)

“After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.” Mark 6:46

“One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night.” Luke 6:12

Some things we might need to think about:

- Do you find it difficult to spend time in prayer?
- Where and when do you pray? Everyone must find their own way and time.
- Do we feel guilty at our lack of prayer?
- Do we understand the necessity of prayer in our lives?
- How well do you know Jesus?

Don't concentrate on the mechanics of prayer, just talk to God naturally. Some people may prefer to read prayers from the liturgy or those written by other people. We must feel comfortable when we pray.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, as John the Baptist had taught his disciples, Jesus said: *“When you pray say”*. In what is commonly called *The Lord's Prayer*, it gives us a structure around which we can pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

To hallow is to show reverence to our Father God who is holy. His name is sacred and never to be profaned. We praise him for who he is and what he has done.

Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We are working, through the Holy Spirit, towards the fulfilment of God's kingdom. We want to live our life here on earth in righteousness and truth, working with God for his will on earth, not our own.

Give us today our daily bread

This is a request that God will meet our needs as he has promised. However, God expects us to do our part in giving.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

Understanding this is of crucial importance. In Matthew 6, Jesus plainly tells us that if we don't forgive others then our prayers will not be answered. Forgiveness is not always easy; it is an act of will. You might say that some things are too hard to forgive. Remember Jesus on the cross when he said, *“Father forgive them for they know not what they do”*. Forgiveness lifts a huge burden from us, and we escape the bitterness that comes to those who refuse it.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

This can also be translated *lead us not into a time of testing*. No one likes to go through testing times but remember God always has our back when no one else has. He will bring us through every trial and tribulation. A lovely gospel song says this:

**He never promised that the cross would not get heavy
Or the hill would not be hard to climb
He never offered us victories without fighting
But he said help would always come in time
Just remember when you're standing in the valley of decision
And the adversary says 'give in'**

Just hold on, our Lord will show up and he will take us through the fire again.

And the prayer finishes on a wonderful note:

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen

If you're not sure how to pray, then start with this prayer that Jesus taught; use it as your pattern.

- Jesus said, when you pray, **say...** If possible, it is good to pray out loud as it helps keep our concentration and focus.
- If Jesus needed to spend time in prayer, that tells us that we also need to do this.
- When Paul said that we should pray without ceasing, I believe he meant we should keep God at the forefront of our minds. In that passage in 1 Thessalonians, it also says: *Rejoice always*. If we are constantly giving praise and thanks, we are rejoicing in God's love and mercy.
- Paul also says: *In everything giving thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*. Note: **IN EVERYTHING GIVING THANKS**. Next time you're going through a difficult situation, do that. As you give thanks, it changes your perspective and fixes your eyes on Jesus instead of your circumstances.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. (1 John 5:14)

Lord, help us to pray about everything, and always give you thanks.

