



Lesson 2-5: **The Supply Line —Prayer** _____

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Matthew 7:7-11

Matthew 26:36-45

Prayer is the believer's supply line. The Bible is God's communication to us; prayer is our response to Him. From His Word we receive instructions and encouragement. From our prayers, He receives our thanks and our requests. Until the line of communication with God is open two ways, our relationship with Him will never be what it is intended to be.

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thess. 5:16-18)

"Pray without ceasing" does not mean that we are to pray non-stop 24 hours a day. The phrase literally says that prayer should be like a hacking cough. Anyone who has ever had a stiff winter cold knows that a hacking cough seems to be always right below the surface, ready to erupt.

When we finally realize that God is the best friend we have, our prayer life starts to take on this kind of flavor. We come to understand that there is nothing in our lives that we should not pray about. The more we listen to God by studying the Word, the better we understand His character; the better we understand His character, the more clearly we realize that there is nothing that we cannot rejoice in and give thanks about.

Communication is the key to a healthy relationship in the physical realm. Even so, our verbal exchanges with other people are never quite what we want them to be. Not one of us is able to fully express what we think or how we feel. Not one of us is able to fully understand or appreciate the thoughts and feelings that others try to explain to us. So in the physical realm there is always a certain amount of frustration and unfulfillment in relationships.

When we pray, the Holy Spirit will intercede on our behalf to the Father, expressing those things for which we cannot find words (Rom. 8:26). And, if we have stored Scripture in our hearts, the Spirit will be able to recall to our minds the words of God that we need at just the moment we need them. We have in the Christian way of life a perfect system. As long as we rely on the filling of the Holy Spirit, that system cannot fail.

It has been said that prayer is the gymnasium of the soul. The fourth-century church father Augustine said: "Pray as if everything depended on God, and then work as if everything depended on you." His dictum is a summary of the Lord's instructions to the disciples in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:7-11

The Lord gives three commands and three promises: If we ask, God will answer; if we seek, we will find; if we knock, God will open the door.

God wants to answer prayer. To illustrate that point, Jesus uses the analogy of a hungry child asking his father for food. The child makes a request. The parent is evil, but out of that evil parent comes a good gift. Why? The parent loves the child and love can bring even from those who are evil, relative good.

Now think of God, who is absolute good. Why is it that we think that the God who is righteous, just, and perfect in every way would give us anything less than the best? How could we imagine that He would be less concerned and less gracious with us than we are with our children?

Each of the three promises Jesus makes in regard to prayer is conditional. Each is based on our obeying an imperative, a command from the Lord Himself.

1. Ask. Asking is the expression of the desire of the soul. "Be anxious for nothing," Paul wrote to the Philippian believers, "but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6-7).

"Ask" here is in present tense, referring to continuous action in the present time. This means that we are to keep on asking; we are to be persistent. But when God answers, will we be listening?

2. **Seek.** Seeking is a step beyond asking. Once we ask, we go looking for the answer. We go in confidence because Jesus Christ Himself promised that God answers and that if we seek we will find.

When we have made a request of God, we must maintain the spiritual desire to obtain the answer. Sometimes, after we pray, the situation we are praying about worsens; it begins to look impossible. God lets that happen often because He wants to know if we believe His promise and are going to follow through.

3. Knock. Knocking means that we labor to see our prayer fulfilled. We can knock in a number of ways. For example, we knock by way of preparation. Are we willing to keep knocking in preparing for God's plan for our life?

We knock in regard to pursuit. Do we pursue the fulfillment for what we have asked for and sought? We knock in the area of practical application. We keep knocking and knock more forcefully. Why? Because we really want what we are asking for. Anything in life that comes without persistence is not worth very much.

Matthew 26:36-45

All of us have probably at some point in life said, "The pain is so great I feel like I am dying." That is exactly how the Lord Jesus Christ felt on this night in the Garden of Gethsemane. He felt unspeakable grief and distress. What did He do in response to the feelings? He did two things that should be an example to us. First, He prayed about His own situation. Second, He asked other people to pray in His behalf.

When He first found them asleep, He warned them to pray for themselves, that they would not enter into temptation. But they didn't listen. And because Peter, James, and John did not wrestle in their prayer, their rest was soon to be interrupted. If we rest before we wrestle, we will never be rested enough.

When we cannot pray anything else, there are two prayers that are always right and always fitting and always honoring to God. One is "Thank you" (Ps. 50:23; 1 Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:20). The other is "Thy will be done" (Matt. 6:10, 26:39).

Energized Prayer

Prayer is like a lamp. We can turn it on and off, on and off, but if it is not plugged in to the power source, if it is not energized, nothing will happen. Every prayer we pray is either energized or it is not. When it is, we are letting loose an earthshaking power.

James 5:16 tells us that "the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." A better translation of that would be: "the energized prayer of any believer has great power." The word "effective" comes from *energeo*, the root of our word "energy;" it means "to energize." The word "accomplish" is *ischuos*, the strongest of five Greek words for power. It means "applied power, demonstrated power." God will demonstrate His power through the energized prayer of His children.

1. Am I in fellowship (Eph. 6:18)? Sin throws up a barrier between God and us and short-circuits our prayer (Isa. 59:2). Self-examination and confession removes the barrier and restores us to fellowship (1 John 1:9, 3:21-22). If we have unconfessed sins in our lives, if we are not filled with the Spirit, our prayers are works of the flesh and have absolutely no power.

2. Am I praying according to the will of God (John 15:7; 1 John 5:14-15)? How do we pray according to His will? We have to know His Word. Lack of study will rob us of the ability to pray effectively. Jesus said that whatever we ask in faith, we will receive. But what is "faith"? It is a response to God's Word. We cannot ask for something in faith unless the Word of God declares that what we ask is the will of God. When we know the Word and our will is in line with His will, then our prayer will be powerful prayer.