

Lesson 5: Conversing with God

Introduction Before the fall, God talked with Adam and Eve face to face. They had a perfect relationship. Unfortunately, the relationship between God and humans was destroyed by sin and humans could not bear seeing God’s face anymore. Thus, they hid themselves from God’s presence (see Genesis 3:8). The goal of salvation in Jesus Christ is that we may stand before a perfect God in face-to-face conversation. According to the Bible, this will take place when we are with God in heaven and on the new earth (see Revelation 22:4). But even now God longs to have fellowship with us. He wants to live in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, to speak to us through His Word, and to listen to our prayers. What a privilege! The Creator of the universe longs for fellowship with every one of us. We can always come to Him in prayer and tell Him what is on our hearts. Yet for many Christians prayer has become a formality, an obligation that has to be fulfilled in order to quiet the conscience. It is something they don’t really enjoy doing. But they do it anyway because it is simply part of being a Christian. Ask yourself this question, “How would you feel if your friends would only talk to you out of obligation or habit, without having a real desire to enter into a deeper relationship with you?” The answer is clear. We wouldn’t consider those people real friends. Now let’s apply this to God. How does He feel when prayers are spoken in this manner? Is it possible that the One who desires intimate fellowship with us could find any satisfaction in this type of relationship?



Read the following statements from Jesus about prayer. What does Jesus say about how we should pray? What does He say about how we shouldn’t pray?

**Matthew
6:5-8**



Here Jesus shows us that God already knows what we need before we ask. Why should we even tell God something in prayer if He already knows everything anyway?

Why pray? God is all knowing. Prayer does not inform God of things He doesn't already know. Neither does it change God's willingness to give us good things. Prayer doesn't bring God into agreement with our will. Rather, it brings us into agreement with His will. Prayer doesn't change God, it changes us! Likewise, prayer doesn't have so much to do with what we *get*, as much as what we *become*.

When we pray, we discover what God is like, what He expects from us, and what we should do according to His will. We learn to speak with God through prayer. And while we are speaking with Him, we will get to know Him better and better.

Quote #1 "In order to commune with God, we must have something to say to Him concerning our actual life. Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 9)

Quote #2 "We should pray in the family circle, and above all we must not neglect secret prayer, for this is the life of the soul. It is impossible for the soul to flourish while prayer is neglected. Family or public prayer alone is not sufficient. In solitude let the soul be laid open to the inspecting eye of God. Secret prayer is to be heard only by the prayer-hearing God. No curious ear is to receive the burden of such petitions. In secret prayer the soul is free from surrounding influences, free from excitement. Calmly, yet fervently, will it reach out after God. Sweet and abiding will be the influence emanating from Him who seeth in secret, whose ear is open to hear the prayer arising from the heart. By calm, simple faith the soul holds communion with God and gathers to itself rays of divine light to strengthen and sustain it in the conflict with Satan. God is our tower of strength." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 98)



Jesus explained how we should pray when He shared the Lord's Prayer. What practical tips for praying can you find in the Lord's Prayer?

**Matthew
6:9-13**

The Lord's Prayer

It is good to pray the Lord's Prayer. But Jesus' intention was not to give us a cookie cutter phrase for prayer. He wanted to show us the essential elements of prayer and how we should relate to God. The Lord's Prayer begins by showing us that we may address God as our Father. Think about what this really means! It would already be incredible if God just accepted us as His servants or even as friends! But He accepts us as children and invites us to call Him "our Father"! What an awesome privilege!

Jesus also showed us that we should start with God when we pray: "Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come." Prayer isn't just about presenting our wish list to God. It is about putting our ego aside and *focusing on God*. But of course, we may ask God for very personal and ordinary things. We may ask God for forgiveness and to grant us protection. Praise, worship, confession of sins, supplication, and intercession are all parts of prayer.



Matthew 7:7-11

What promise does Jesus give us here?

More than a Father

Jesus portrays a beautiful picture of God. When we bring our concerns to God in prayer, He is happier than an earthly father whose children come to him with their concerns, and more willing to give them what they need. God delights in giving us what we need!

Quote #3

"Our heavenly Father waits to bestow upon us the fullness of His blessing. It is our privilege to drink largely at the fountain of boundless love. What a wonder it is that we pray so little! God is ready and willing to hear the sincere prayer of the humblest of His children, and yet there is much manifest reluctance on our part to make known our wants to God. What can the angels of heaven think of poor helpless human beings, who are subject to temptation, when God's heart of infinite love yearns toward them, ready to give them more than they can ask or think, and yet they pray so little and have so little faith?" (*Steps to Christ, p. 94*)

Ellen White and her Father

Ellen White knew God as her Father! H.M.S. Richards, founder of the Voice of Prophecy, provides us with one of the best glimpses we have of her in prayer. When Richards was about 16, Mrs. White attended the Colorado camp meeting, where his father was pastoring. She had been preaching for about 30 minutes when her son, Willie, came up behind her and told her that she had a long journey ahead of her and the she had better quit so that she could conserve her strength. But even at 81 she

was difficult to halt. “I don’t want to stop yet,” she told him, “I haven’t prayed yet; I want to pray.” She preached for another three minutes or so, and then knelt and prayed. Richards didn’t remember much about her sermon, but her prayer deeply impressed him. “Her first words were,” he recalled, “‘Oh, my Father.’ She didn’t say ‘Our Father’ – it was ‘my Father.’ Within two minutes there was a mighty power that came over that whole place. She was talking to Him. She’d forgotten all about us. She only prayed about five to six minutes at the most, but as she prayed there were sobs all over that audience – people weeping over their sins.” In 1958, Richards recalled that it was that prayer that convinced him that Ellen White was a prophet. “When she prayed,” he noted, “I knew that she was God’s servant. She talked to God as though she knew Him. I knew that she was all that she claimed to be when I heard her pray.”
(George Knight, Walking with Ellen White: the human interest story, p. 111)



John 14:13-14

Jesus always encouraged people to approach God in prayer as their Heavenly Father. But he also talked about the conditions under which God will hear our prayers. Which condition is mentioned in this passage?

In Jesus’ Name

Here Jesus invites us to pray in His name. What does that mean? It means certainly more than the customary words at the end of every prayer “in Jesus’ name“. It is good to use these words, but we must be aware of their meaning and believe it with our whole hearts.

Jesus promises that He will answer our prayers when we pray in His name. Compare this statement with 1 John 5:14-15! What condition is mentioned here?

John wrote: “if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” So, to pray in Jesus’ name means to pray as He would, according to His will. We ask, “Jesus, if you were in my place, what would you pray right now?”

Quote #4

“But to pray in the name of Jesus is something more than a mere mention of that name at the beginning and the ending of a prayer. It is to pray in the mind and spirit of Jesus, while we believe His promises, rely upon His grace, and work His works.” *(Steps to Christ, p. 100)*

Quote #5

“But to pray in Christ’s name means much. It means that we are to accept His character, manifest His spirit, and work His works.” *(The Desire of Ages, p. 668)*

Your Will be Done!

When we ask God for something in the name of Jesus, it means that we are putting ourselves completely under His will. Jesus Himself prayed just as He taught us in the Lord’s Prayer, “Not as I will, but as you will.”

If we pray to God with this attitude, God will always hear your prayers. This doesn’t

mean that we will always get exactly what we ask for. But we will get what is best for us and at the right time. God answers us in one of three ways:

1. He says, "Yes."
2. He says, "Wait."
3. He says, "No, I have something better for you."

To pray in the name of Jesus means to submit to God's will and wait for Him to answer our prayers in the way He knows best.

Quote #6 "We all desire immediate and direct answers to our prayers, and are tempted to become discouraged when the answer is delayed or comes in an unlooked-for form. But God is too wise and good to answer our prayers always at just the time and in just the manner we desire. He will do more and better for us than to accomplish all our wishes. And because we can trust His wisdom and love, we should not ask Him to concede to our will, but should seek to enter into and accomplish His purpose. Our desires and interests should be lost in His will." (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 230)

We have an Intercessor! But there is more. Jesus is our intercessor before the Father and brings our prayers to God just like the high priest brought the prayers of the Israelites, figuratively shown by the incense brought into the temple. Let's read how Paul expressed these thoughts in Hebrews 7:25!

When we pray in the name of Jesus, we acknowledge that it is His merit alone that brings our prayers to God. We are also asking Him to present our petitions to God as our High Priest. Jesus' intercession doesn't persuade the Father to do something He would otherwise not want to do. Rather, it is evidence that we have surrendered our lives to God through Jesus Christ allowing Him to work more thoroughly in our lives in the great conflict between good and evil.

Quote #7 "As yet the disciples were unacquainted with the Saviour's unlimited resources and power. He said to them, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name." John 16:24. He explained that the secret of their success would be in asking for strength and grace in His name. He would be present before the Father to make request for them. The prayer of the humble suppliant He presents as His own desire in that soul's behalf. Every sincere prayer is heard in heaven. It may not be fluently expressed; but if the heart is in it, it will ascend to the sanctuary where Jesus ministers, and He will present it to the Father without one awkward, stammering word, beautiful and fragrant with the incense of His own perfection." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 667)

Quote #8 "The darkness of the evil one encloses those who neglect to pray. The whispered temptations of the enemy entice them to sin; and it is all because they do not make use of the privileges that God has given them in the divine appointment of prayer. Why should the sons and daughters of God be reluctant to pray, when prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse, where are treasure the boundless resources of Omnipotence? Without unceasing prayer and diligent watching we are in danger of growing careless and of deviating from the right path. The adversary seeks continually to obstruct the way to the mercy seat, that we may not by earnest supplication and faith obtain grace and power to resist temptation." (*Steps to*

Christ, p. 94)

Quote #9 “Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. “The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” James 5:11. His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them. Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3. The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 100*)

Be a Person of Prayer! Whenever God has done something great for the church or for an individual believer it has been in answer to earnest prayer. Resolve to be a person of prayer. Experience God as a heavenly Father, who is waiting longingly to richly bless you and to accomplish great things through you.



In light of this topic what has become important to you? What has God made clear to you? What decision(s) would you like to make? What would you like to share with God in prayer?



Your homework for this lesson

1. Work through this lesson carefully and prayerfully. Mark the statements that are important to you and write your answers in the spaces given.
2. The memory verse for this lesson is found in Matthew 7:11. Write it word for word on an index card and learn it by heart.
3. In the next couple of days, speak with someone about one of the points from this lesson that personally spoke to you and share with them what you have learned!