

Prayer

Communicating with God



Class Section 1: Our Relationship with the Lord

* A Good Relationship

It takes time and effort to build a good relationship with someone. Let's look at some of the ways we can apply the lessons we learn with people to our relationship with the Lord.

We need to invest time into building a relationship and give the person our attention.—We talked in the last class about focusing on the Lord when we pray, even visualizing Him if we can.

We should talk to Jesus as we would to our best friend. In a good friendship, one person doesn't do all the talking! So we need to be sure to not only talk to Him, but most importantly, listen to Him.

A good relationship also needs lots of appreciation and thankfulness and not taking the other for granted. We need to thank the Lord for what He gives us and does for us.



* The story of Mary and Martha

All our activities and work might be good and necessary, but we should not neglect our relationship with Jesus. Let's look at this in the Bible.

Luke 10:38-42—Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

- Who do you identify more with—Mary or Martha?
- If you were Martha, how would you have reacted to Jesus' words?

*** What if you feel you've failed?**

When we slip and fall because of sin or disobedience, it's easy to feel condemned, like, "Oh, I can't possibly be close to the Lord because of my sins, because of all my faults and shortcomings!" But you must not let the Devil—or even your own heart—condemn you.

1 John 3:20—For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

Romans 8:1—There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Even if you have disobeyed the Lord, if you're sorry for your sins and you sincerely desire to be close to Him, He forgives you.

Psalm 103:8—The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

Psalm 37:24—Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand.

I John 1:9—If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

A lot has to do with your heart, with your attitude. If you sincerely want to please the Lord and do His will, love Jesus and live for Him, then He will certainly "draw nigh unto you" when you call out to Him. David of old wrote:

Psalm 145:18—The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.

Psalm 34:18—The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.

So regardless of any feelings of discouragement or condemnation that the Devil may try to barrage you with, if you know you're truly seeking to love and please the Lord, obey His Word and follow Him, then you're close to Him!—Whether you happen to feel close to Him or not!

*** The Lord is always there, no matter how you feel**

We've talking about concentrating and we've talked about visualizing the Lord when you pray, and we've talked in the previous classes about the gifts of the Spirit, but maybe you haven't felt any different. Maybe you don't feel close to Jesus. The Bible makes it very clear that we're not supposed to go by our feelings, or by any of our physical senses!

2 Corinthians 5:7—For we walk by faith, not by sight.

The Lord loves each of us very much and promises to be with us. Whether we feel we are close to Him or not, we can know from His Word that He is close to us! His Love for us is unchangeable, unwavering.

Hebrews 13:5b—For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Isaiah 54:10—"For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has mercy on you.

* The closer walk

How do you get close to Jesus? You get close to Jesus by obeying His Word and yielding to His will and taking time with Him! Jesus says,



John 14:23—If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

If you're obeying what He says in His Word, if you're spending time praising Him, talking to Him, listening to Him, and reading His Word, then of course you're close to the Lord!—He'll come and make His home with you. Paul says,

Hebrews 10:22—Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Class Section 2: The Prayer Habit

* The good habit of prayer

Luke 18:1—Men always ought to pray and not lose heart.

1 Chronicles 16:11—Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore!

1 Thessalonians 5:17—Pray without ceasing.

Ephesians 6:18—Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

Philippians 4:6-7—Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.



* Making prayer a habit!

The key to being prayerful is making it a habit. There's not really anything that's so mystical or mysterious about it, you just have to keep doing it and keep at it, faithfully acknowledging Him in all your ways

Proverbs 3:6—In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

To truly make prayer a habit you have to endeavor to pray about everything! Of course, it's a good start if you pray before you eat and before you travel and before you go to bed and upon waking up, but what about all the other things you do during the day? You could pray about which work you should do, or if you already know, if it's a set pattern, you could pray about how to do it. If you faithfully pray every day before doing your work, the Lord might show you a better way of doing it that day, or a faster way.

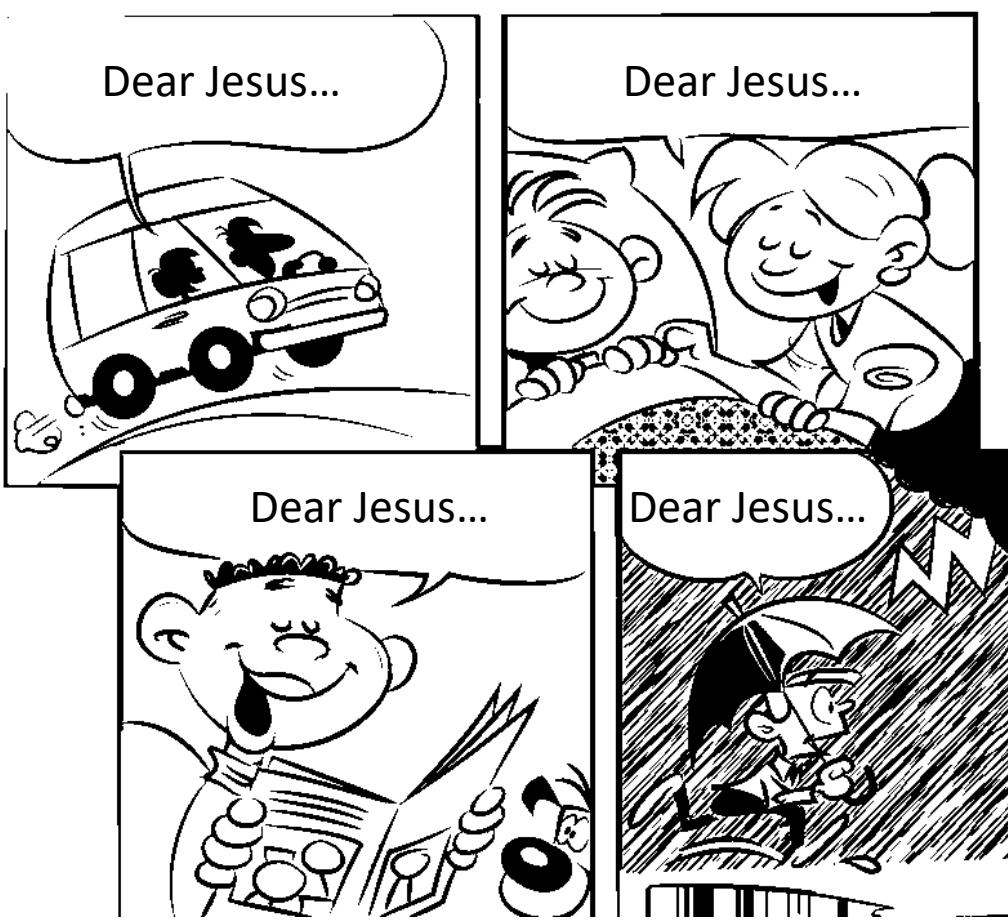
One of the most important phrases we could introduce to our vocabulary and which we should frequently use is, "Let's stop and pray."

To form a good habit takes a lot of conscious effort over a period of time. It also usually involves a lot of forgetting and some remembering. Then, finally we start remembering more than we forget!

* Nothing is too small for the Lord

Sometimes we don't think about praying for little things. Maybe you lose your pen or you have a cold or you need a certain article of clothing. None of these are drastic situations. However, one of the ways that the Lord can get us into the habit of praying is to teach us to pray for the little things. If we only pray for big things, big things don't usually come along very often, at least not often enough to cause us to make a habit of prayer.

If we get into the habit of praying for the little things that come along, then we will automatically get in the habit of praying for everything—big or small. And if we pray for the little things and see how the Lord answers in those miraculous little ways that He does, then our faith will be increased to face the bigger needs when they come up!



Another reason to pray for little things could be illustrated by the above example of the case of someone with a simple cold. If you don't pray for healing, you could get sicker. The "little" thing can become a very big thing if we don't pray!

* Waiting for the Lord to work

Someone once said "God's delays are not denials." We don't always get immediate answers to our prayers, and that causes us to exercise patience.

James 1:3-4—Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

James 5:10—My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.

We can't always see how the Lord is going to answer prayer, and we can't always see why He may delay answering. Whatever happens, we need to remember that the Lord will never fail. He will bring what He knows is best to pass. Sometimes when we pray He answers with a "yes"; sometimes with a "no"; and sometimes with a "wait"!

Even if we can't always see with our eyes what the Lord is doing, we can see with eyes of faith because He's promised to answer prayer.

Matthew 7:7—Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

John 15:7—If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Mark 11:24—Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

* The importance of praying for others

1 Samuel 12:23a—Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.

Romans 15:30—Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me.

1 Thessalonians 1:2—We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.

Praying for others is an important part of your prayer life. Sometimes it helps to keep a list of those in special need of prayer. When you know people who are struggling with problems, the very best you can do for them is pray for them!

For you to do: Write up a prayer list and keep it in your Bible or next to your bed to remind you to pray for those people and situations.

Her lasting legacy

There was once a young invalid who lay upon her deathbed. She had given herself to God and was distressed because she could not labor for Him actively among the lost. Her pastor visited her, and hearing her complaint, told her that from her sick bed she could pray earnestly. He went away and thought of the subject no more. Soon a feeling of religious interest sprung up in the village and the churches were crowded nightly. The little invalid heard of the progress of the revival and inquired anxiously for the names of the saved. A few weeks later she died and among a roll of papers that was found under her pillow was one bearing the names of 56 persons, every one of whom had been converted in the revival. By each name was a little cross, by which the poor crippled saint had checked off the names of the converts as they had been reported to her.

* Ways to pray

Prayer is not judged by the length of words. Sometimes you'll be praying for a desperate situation and you'll want to go into details with the Lord. Other times your prayer can be very short.

The most important thing about your prayer is that you're concentrating on the Lord, whether you pray a lengthy or short prayer!

ABC...

A little lad was keeping his sheep one Sunday morning. The bells were ringing for church and the people were going over the field, when the little fellow began to think that he, too, would like to pray to God. But what could he say? He had never learned a prayer. So he knelt down and commenced the alphabet—A, B, C, and so on to Z.

A gentleman happening to pass on the other side of the hedge heard the lad's voice, and, looking through the bushes, saw the little fellow kneeling with folded hands and closed eyes, saying, "A, B, C."

"What are you doing, my little man?"

"Please, sir, I was praying."

"But what are you saying your letters for?"

"Why, I didn't know any prayer, only I felt that I wanted God to take care of me and help me to care for the sheep; so I thought if I said all I knew, He would put it together and spell all I want."

"Bless your heart, my little man, He will, He will, He will. When the heart speaks right, the lips can't say wrong."

Class Section 3: Praise

* The importance of thanking and praising the Lord

We've talked a lot today about the petition aspect of prayer. Now we want to focus on praise and thankfulness.

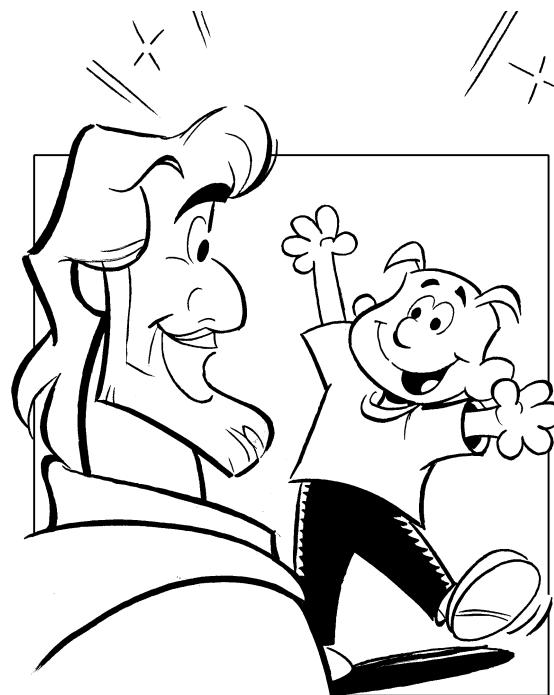
1 Thessalonians 5:18—In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Psalm 34:1—I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

Psalm 86:12—I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore.

Psalm 118:21—I will praise You, for You have answered me, and have become my salvation.

Psalm 105:1-2—Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; talk of all His wondrous works!

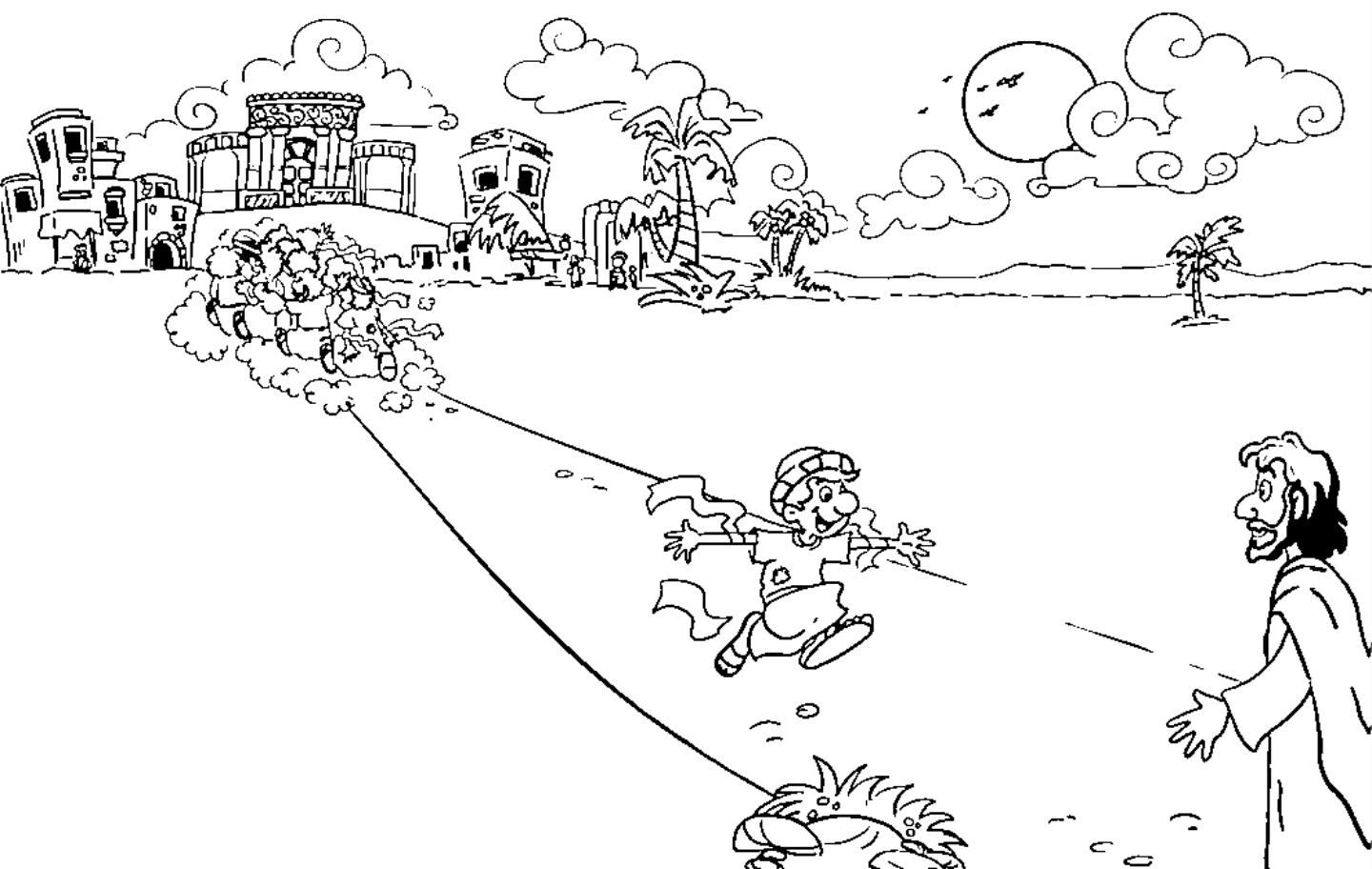


Any relationship is very one-sided if it involves a lot of taking but not much giving. The Lord certainly doesn't mind our taking all that He has for us, but in return He looks for our thanks and appreciation. He wants us to acknowledge that we are pleased with all the gifts that He has given us and how He takes care of us so well! He delights in taking care of us, but part of His pleasure is receiving our gratitude.

The story of the leper who returned to praise God

Luke 17:12-19—As Jesus entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, crying out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” He looked at them and said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” (According to the custom of the Jews, after a leper had been healed, he was to present himself to the priest to verify his healing.) And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy.

One of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? “Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”



* Taking time to say "thank you" to Jesus

Often we keep asking for our needs, but then we almost get too busy gathering up all our blessings that we don't take time to thank Him for them!

The courteous, polite thing to do when one receives a gift is to sit down and write a thank-you letter—to take the time and effort to acknowledge your gratitude. When you take this special time to voice your appreciation, the sender then knows that it meant something to you. However, if he hears nothing, or maybe just a "one-liner" stuck in the middle of another barrage of requests, he figures that his gift must not have meant very much to you. He also can quite legitimately figure that giving you all the other things that you are asking for will be met with the same lack of gratitude.

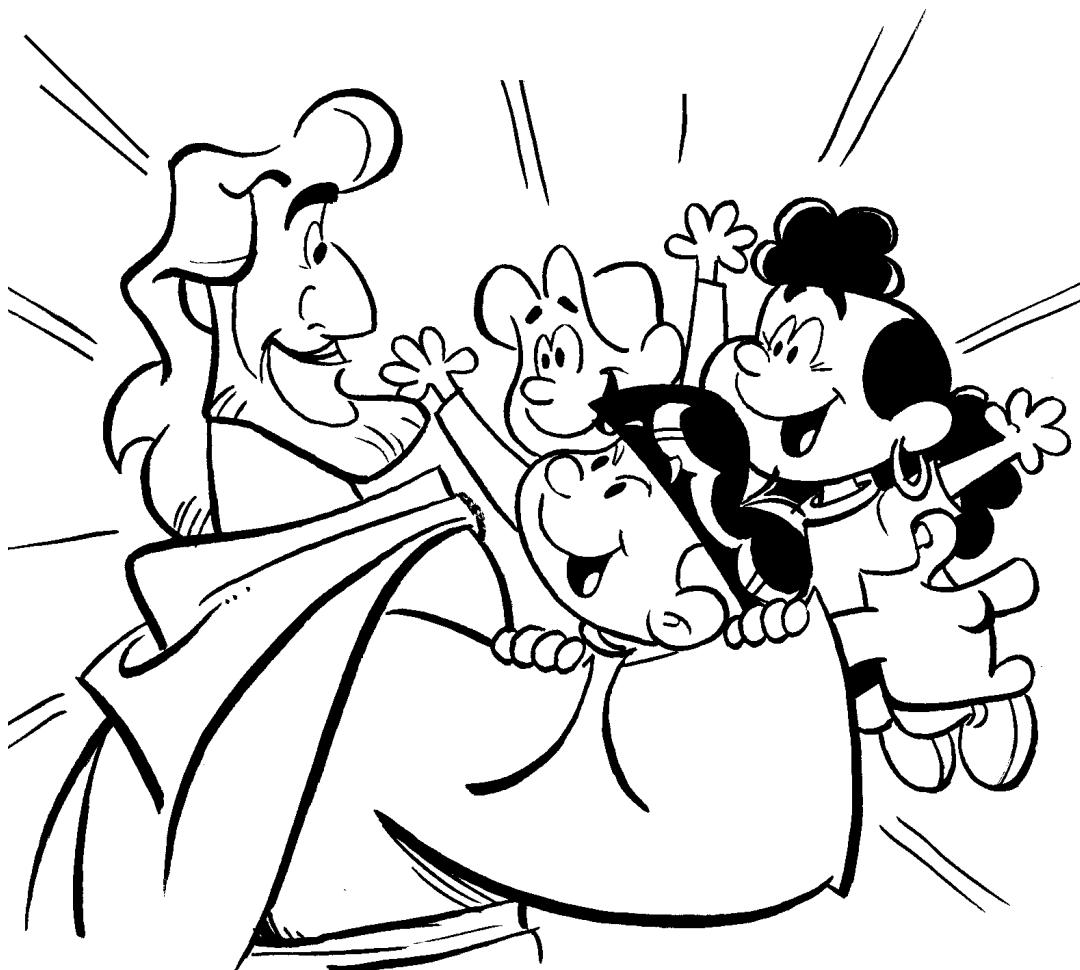
Therefore it's a little difficult for the Lord to keep pouring out His gifts to you when you don't take time to properly acknowledge them, showing your gratefulness and thankfulness by stopping and formulating your "letter of thanks" to Him for the wonderful gifts that He has sent you—in this case, God's priceless gifts, treasures so rich and so valuable they can only come from His hand— blessing upon blessing!

Here are some ideas of what to do:

- Sing a song of praise to the Lord.
- Close your eyes and thank Him for specific blessings.
- Read a poem of thanks.
- Read a written "praise."

Jesus, I don't always stop and thank You when things are going well. It seems like sometimes I only remember to do that when things turn bad.—Well, actually, not even right away when they turn bad, but often only after they've been bad and You've turned them good again. That's not very nice of me, is it, Jesus? Please help me to have faith to praise You even when things don't look so good, because I know that all things work together for good to them who love You (Romans 8:28).

I want to thank You for showing me that. And, before I forget, I'm going to say with my whole heart that I appreciate all the good things You do for me, the ones I see and the ones I don't even notice. You make so many things turn out right, and I just love You more than ever.



Help me to tell You more and to love and praise You more often. Thanks a lot, Jesus. I really appreciate You!