

# Accepting Adversity and Tragedy

## Lesson 11 When and How to Pray

### Introduction

In our study to this point we have looked at the many questions that arise when we see tragedies in the world, and even more to the point: when we see adversity among our loved ones or experience it firsthand. Sometimes there are answers to our questions, but other times we must simply admit that the thoughts and ways of God are higher than ours. But even though we may not fully understand the adversities we experience, we still want to know: what should we do about them? The Bible's answer is simpler than we may expect. James 5:13, *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray."* In this lesson and the following one we want to take a look at the role of prayer. God expects us to pray in times of need, and His scriptures have a lot to say about the purpose and method of prayer.

### The Power of Prayer

Read James 5:13-18. Not only does James say that we should pray when we suffer, but he makes it clear that prayer is a powerful.

1. If someone is sick, what are they do? What are they to expect will be done for them?
2. What will the prayer of faith do for those who are sick?
3. What is true of the prayers of a righteous man?
4. What example is given of the power of prayer?

As we will see below, not only should we pray in a time of sickness, but it is appropriate to pray in many situations. In the context of this study, we should in particular pray for:

- The ability to accept our circumstances
- The ability to understand our situation
- Greater faith to face our trials (remember the request of the father in Mark 9:24)
- Relief from our trials and afflictions
- Alleviation of our loved ones' pain and suffering
- Safety and protection
- Wisdom to explain to others the goodness of God

### God's Willingness to Hear

We may not always understand why God allows something to happen, but we can be assured of God's interest in hearing us for we have a high priest who also suffered (Hebrews 2:18), one who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses having been tempted as we are (Hebrews 4:15). Thus the Hebrews writer says we should; *"with confidence draw near to*

*the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"*  
(Hebrews 4:16).

Read Luke 18:1-8 and Matthew 7:7-11. Jesus is assuring us of God's desire for our prayer:

1. According to vs. 1, what was the main purpose of the parable in Luke 18?
2. What was Jesus concerned that He might not find (18:8)?
3. What is said of God in Matthew 7:11?
4. What promise is given to us in Matthew 7:7-8 and also Luke 11:9-10

We often wonder when we should pray; when does our problem merit God's attention. The Scriptures above make it clear that God is prepared to not only hear us, but also to respond. Look at Luke 11:5-13 and again at Luke 18:1-8. The answer would seem to be - if a circumstance is important to us it will be important to God. Note in these two parables that each of the two petitioners went to the only person who could help them, and each sought something very important to them; in one case justice and in the other aid for a friend.

As you think back over the adversities and trials we have studied; consider how many times our needs fit this same pattern. We face a trial where only God can help us. We urgently desire the request we make of God. There is no reason to doubt that we should pray in such situations. The question really should be do we pray enough, and do we pray as we should.

Look at these Biblical examples of those who prayed when in distress:

1. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-39)
2. Paul and Silas (Acts 16:22-25, see also Paul's statement in Philippians 4:6)
3. Peter and James (Acts 4:23-29, see also Peter's statement in I Peter 5:6-11)
4. The Jerusalem Church (Acts 12:5)
5. Manasseh (II Chronicles 33:10-13)
6. David (Psalms 17:6-13)

### **How to Pray**

The manner of our prayer does matter. James refers to those who do not receive because they ask wrongly (James 4:3). Our prayers in times of distress should have at least three characteristics:

1. Ask in Faith  
James tells us to ask in faith with no doubting, being promised that a doubting person should not suppose that he or she will receive anything (James 1:6-7). If we recognize that God wants us to pray, we should have confidence that our prayer will be heard, that God will respond.

2. Ask Persistently

Think again of the parables in Luke 11 and 18 and the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:7-11). We are told repeatedly of the value of persistence. It may well be that there is value to us in simply going to God often in prayer, but these passages also imply that our prayers are more effective, they accomplish more, when we pray to God with fervor and persistence.

3. Ask that God's Will Be Done

It is easier to say this than to mean it. We have the example of Jesus who prayed in the Garden the night he was betrayed. Hebrews 5:7 refers to this prayer saying that Jesus, *"offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence"*. Yet we know that Jesus did die. In His prayer, Jesus repeatedly prayed for relief, but each time adding *"Yet not what I will, but what You will"* (Mark 14:36).

**A Look Ahead**

Even proper prayer does not assure us of relief from our problems in life. In the next lesson, we will look at accepting God's response whatever it may be.