

# **PRAYER**

## **Lesson 5: Pray Sincerely**

- 1. Warnings against insincerity*
- 2. Examples of heartfelt prayers*

### **INTRODUCTION**

What is the most honest form of speech human beings are capable of? It has to be the cry of an infant. Babies are still incapable of flattery, subtlety, duplicity, or any of the other forms of insincerity that plague adults. When they're hungry, or hurt, or afraid, they know exactly how they feel, and they don't hesitate to let the whole world know.

The prayers of the psalmists are like the cries of babies. Sometimes they're anguished cries; sometimes they're jubilant; sometimes they're calm and reflective. But they are never anything but completely open and honest with the Lord as they speak with him. For that and other reasons, they're ideal models for our prayers.

Today's lesson explores warnings and examples to encourage us toward sincere prayer.

### **I. Warnings Against Insincerity**

Matthew 6:5-8 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. <sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

1. Why do the "hypocrites" pray? (verse 5)
2. What is wrong with the way pagans pray? (verse 7)
3. Using verses 6 and 8, complete this thought: We pray sincerely when we remember that . . .

### **His Word in My Life**

1.) Agree or Disagree: Brief prayers are always better than long prayers.

2.) Agree or Disagree: It is hypocritical to say a table prayer before eating in public.

3.) What are the pros and cons of using prayers written by others?

## II. Examples of Heartfelt Prayer

1 Samuel 1:1-20 There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. <sup>2</sup> He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. <sup>3</sup> Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup> But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>6</sup> And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. <sup>7</sup> This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. <sup>8</sup> Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

<sup>9</sup> Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. <sup>10</sup> In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. <sup>11</sup> And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

<sup>12</sup> As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. <sup>13</sup> Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk <sup>14</sup> and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine." <sup>15</sup> "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. <sup>16</sup> Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." <sup>17</sup> Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." <sup>18</sup> She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

<sup>19</sup> Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. <sup>20</sup> So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

1. List the words in the account that describe Hannah's state of mind as she prayed.

2. How does Hannah describe her act of praying? (v. 15)

3. Why did Hannah feel better after she prayed?

4. Evaluate: If our prayer is to be sincere, we must have all the emotions Hannah displayed in her prayer. If they are not present, we should work on it.

**2 Kings 19:14-19** Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers [of king Sennacherib] and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. <sup>15</sup> And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: "O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. <sup>16</sup> Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. <sup>17</sup> It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. <sup>18</sup> They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands. <sup>19</sup> Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God."

5. Hezekiah had just received a letter from the powerful king of Assyria in which that wicked king threatened to destroy Jerusalem. What did Hezekiah do with the letter?

6. How is Hezekiah's prayer similar to Hannah's? How is it different?

### His Word in My Life

1.) Agree or disagree: We should pray only for those things that we feel very strongly about.

2.) Evaluate the following statement: When you feel like praying, pray. When you don't feel like praying, pray until you do.

### SUMMARY

#### Life with God

- Day 1: Open your Bible to the book of Psalms and jot down an adjective that describes the emotions it evokes and what the psalmist's reasons are for feeling so.
- Day 2: Consider an episode in your life (past or present) where you have felt the same or been in similar circumstances.

- Day 3: Find a hymn in the hymnal the conveys the same emotions (note the headings can help you find different occasions and themes in the hymnal).
- Day 4: Using a prayer book or the front of the hymnal (p. 255), find a prayer that captures your thoughts or concerns, then make it your own.
- Day 5: In the same prayer book or hymnal not an occasion that is overlooked or neglected and write your own prayer.
- Day 6: Rather than pray orally or mentally, write God a letter (remember ACTS). Save it in your Bible.
- Day 7: Pull out the letter you wrote to God yesterday. Does it convey what you want to say today? What would you add? subtract? change?