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## Sentence Prayer

### —A secret to help you pray

**P**rayer, as I'm sure you realise, is essential to our salvation. "You, beloved, building yourself up in your most holy faith, and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 1:20). Jesus taught that people "ought always to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

In this lesson, I am going to tell you a secret that will help you solve problems with prayer. It will therefore help you to do what you ought, hold on to your faith, and keep yourself in the love of God.

### 1 *Why We Neglect to Pray*

Before I tell you the secret, let's just briefly think about the problem of prayer neglect or reluctance. There are many reasons for this problem: distress, habit, overcrowded life, fear of God, feeling unworthy, physical and emotional exhaustion, and so forth. The fact is that prayer may become more difficult at the very time it is most needed.

### The Holy Spirit's Help

Paul says the Holy Spirit helps us in this problem, and this is wonderful: "The Spirit also helps our weakness, for we don't know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

This does not mean, however, that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us *instead* of our having to pray ourselves. He helps us *as we try* to pray. If we neglect to pray, we neglect to draw help from the Holy Spirit. This promise of the Spirit's intercession is marvelous, but it does not cancel out the causes of prayer neglect.

How, then, can we overcome prayer block, and start praying as we ought, so as to tap into the Spirit's intercession and the blessings of prayer? This is where the secret comes in. At this point in our lesson, I'd like you to imagine you hear a drumroll, because now I am going to tell you a secret that can really change your life...

### 2 *The Secret of Sentence Prayer*

I don't know why what I am about to tell you is a secret, because it's plainly and frequently revealed in the Bible for all to see and understand. Not only that, but at our meal tables we mostly say or hear a prayer of thanks that uses this secret.

Yet very few people seem to be aware of the secret. Perhaps it's because we learn to pray by imitating others rather than by looking into the Bible to see how we should pray. Okay, what is this secret? The Bible clearly shows us that *one short simple sentence is an effective prayer*.

### A Sentence Prayer at Gethsemane

Our Lord, at Gethsemane, spent an hour with God, but in that time he said very little. "Father, if at all possible, let this cup pass from me —nevertheless not my will, but yours be done." He prayed this sentence prayer three separate times (Matthew 26:36-44).

Jesus condemned "vain repetition" and "many words" in prayers (Matthew 6:7).

The prayer he taught his disciples, as an example of how to pray, consists of seven simple sentences, each a complete prayer in itself (Matthew 6:9-13).

When you need to talk to the heavenly Father, all that is usually needed is a sentence or two. That is possible for you. By putting this "secret" into practice, you will overcome prayer block. You will become a prayerful person again. You will find yourself praying often, because your only burden is to say a short simple sentence or two to God.

There may be occasions when a longer prayer is needed, yet that would consist of many things asked or stated in few words, not few things in many words.

Can you imagine a person drowning, calling out, "Oh friends, yea even strangers, my fellows (glub) on this unrivalled orb, hearken unto me (gasp) and show me compassion. Rescue me, I pray, from this my watery grave. Consider my (glub) plight and hasten to lend me your arms, else I perish..." No, a person drowning calls out, "Help, somebody, help me!"

### 3 More Examples of Sentence Prayer

You could leave the lesson at this point, and consider it finished. Or you could let me add a few more examples as below...

- The New Testament writers used benedictions and doxologies that are, in fact, sentence prayers. For example, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (eg Romans 1:7).
- Hundreds of verses in the Psalms take the form of sentence prayers (eg Psalms 119:10,38, Psalms 119:73,105).

I'll close with the priestly blessing in the book of Numbers. It is just three short sentences, and each sentence itself could stand on its own as a prayer:

"The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6:22-27).

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