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# VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: THE LORD'S PRAYER

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## LECTURE 13: DIFFICULTIES IN PRAYER

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**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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# *Module*

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## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

*Dr. Gerald R. Procee*

Presented in 14 Lectures called  
**THE BEAUTY OF PRAYER**

1. Introduction: Biblical Foundation and Course Outline
2. Our Father Which Art in Heaven
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4. Thy Kingdom Come
5. Thy Will Be Done on Earth as it Is in Heaven
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## *Lecture 13*

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# **DIFFICULTIES IN PRAYER**

Welcome to lecture number 13 in the series of the Beauty of Prayer. Today we're going to consider the difficulties in prayer because personal prayer is not easy. When you try to pray, you will meet with all kinds of opposition. We may find it difficult to allot sufficient time for prayer. We may suffer from physical weakness, or from spiritual lack of strength. At times it will be hard to concentrate.

The evil one will try to distort our prayers by injecting all kinds of strange, foolish, and sinful thoughts exactly while we are praying. At times we will not even be able to use words, and then our needs are vented to the Lord, are laid before the Lord in the way of groaning and sighing. Memory of past sins will harass us, pain that others have inflicted upon us may come to the fore exactly during prayer.

The evil one will try to hinder our prayers because he is afraid of prayer because God is Almighty; and what God will do due to the prayers of His people, the devil does not know. That's why God's people are called to pray and persevere. A severe assault upon prayer is that the enemy will cause us to think that God will not hear our prayers. Then we accuse ourselves that we are carnal.

We see our sins, and then the thought can arise, "God will not hear our prayer." However, when we look at Scripture, we see remarkable instances of how the Lord heard prayers, even of sinful people, of unconverted people. These were people who are under [the] impression of the truth, and they believed God's Truth, while their hearts were still hardened and were not truly converted. Yet, the miracle is [that] God still heard their prayers.

For instance, King Ahab governed the 10 tribes of Israel. During his reign, he led the people in the country into the darkness of sin. He and Jezebel implemented idol worship as never before. He caused the people of Israel to go astray, and then Ahab sinned because he allowed Naboth to be murdered on false accusations. Then suddenly, the prophet Elijah met Ahab and proclaimed the royal house of Ahab would fall down, and they would all be killed, and Ahab too.

Then in response, the king tore his clothes; he put sackcloth on; he walked softly (I Kings 21:27). He had sorrow because of his sins. It was not that he had a true evangelical repentance, but he still humbled himself. He was very much afraid of the judgment of God, and then the Lord even heard his lamentations. Elijah had to go to Ahab and tell him that this curse would not come upon Ahab during his lifetime. Ahab received even more time to truly repent, so God heard a prayer of a sinful, unconverted sinner.

What shall we think of the men of Nineveh who repented upon the preaching of the prophet Jonah? The only thing that Jonah proclaimed to them was "40 days Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). The people of

Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast. They put on sackcloth, and their king arose from his throne. Normally, a king would not rise from a throne. He is king; he sits, but this king arose from his throne and covered himself with sackcloth and ashes.

They turned to the Lord in Jonah 3:9, “Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not.” We don’t read that they all became god-fearing people. We don’t read that Nineveh became a Christian nation. No, they remained heathens, and yet God heard their prayers. “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and then God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not,” Jonah 3:10, an example [of] how the Lord hears even sinful people.

When we are afflicted that, because of our sins, God will not hear us, don’t believe those temptations or those thoughts. Cast them far from you. Little children when they pray may only have a childlike, a formal faith, but God will hear them. We can pray for true conversion because we do not know that life of conversion. God will hear such a prayer.

There are other difficulties that we may contend with as we seek to know a life of prayer. We can be very busy with our daily work. We may perform mental labors or physical work, and we can be so busy with our daily work that we devote all our time to that. It’s a temptation the devil casts before us. We mentioned that in a previous lecture, but we must be alert for this difficulty in prayer and overcome it.

We may not be devoured by our daily labor, and we may not allow the cares of daily life to crush us because then the good seed of the gospel will also be crushed, and there will be no spiritual fruit in our lives. On the other hand, because of the busyness of daily life, we can be even lazy, complacent, have no time to pray. We must be diligent. There’s only one thing necessary in life really, and that is to know, to love, and obey the Lord Jesus Christ.

Never may we allow our daily labors to interfere with the spiritual work of prayer. If we do not pray, then our work, however good it may be, will become sinful. Another hindrance to prayer is ignorance of the nature of God. That is that we do not realize the loving kindness of God and that we do not see His desire that He is willing to give all that is needed. Ignorance of the nature of God leads to a lack of faith, and that’s very detrimental to prayer life.

A lack of knowledge of God’s mercy, a lack of awareness of His bountiful goodness, that will be detrimental to prayer. Be aware [of] Who God is: full of loving kindness, gracious, willing to hear the prayers of His people, caring for them as the most loving Father. Be aware of Who God is that you are praying to. Another difficulty is that the evil one will try to distance us from the Lord. He will try to cause a distance between us and God.

That’s what he did to Adam and Eve in Paradise. He tempted them to sin. They listened to his lies, and then they withdrew themselves from the Lord. That’s exactly what the devil wanted to accomplish: that they would hide themselves, that they would distance themselves from God, and so rebel against Him. The devil is trying to lead people into a certain sin, causing a separation between them and the Lord.

We are to examine our lives daily and be alert that there will be no distancing between us and God. A very common hindrance to prayer is also worldliness: living for this world, being enamored by what this world has to offer, having love to the world, having pride of life. That’s very detrimental to prayer. We may not allow love to the world to be present in our lives. We may not have a worldly, cold attitude in our own souls towards others because that will hinder the access to God.

Prayer life will not be able to continue. The evil one will also cause difficulties by injecting terrible thoughts into the minds of God’s people, painful thoughts, self-reproach: ‘We have sinned too much; our sins are too great.’ The devil says, “You better stop praying. How dare you approach God with such unclean lips.” Repeatedly God’s people can become entangled with sin, and they hate it, and then the temptation is to stop prayer.

They find themselves to be unclean. We find an example of this in Zechariah 3:3. There you find the high priest Joshua standing before the Lord with filthy clothes. That’s a picture of his uncleanness and sinfulness. The devil is rebuking him and wants to curtail his work as high priest, but the Lord intervened for his servant, and spoke in verse 4, “Take away the filthy garments from him. Unto Zechariah the Lord says, ‘Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee. I will clothe thee with change of raiment.’”

When we become entangled with sin, we must confess it before the Lord that the Lord, in spite of our sins, would yet receive our prayers only because of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Another major difficulty in prayer is that we think that God does not answer our prayers. There can be times that it seems like that. It can

even be that the Lord does defer answering our prayers. He postpones the answer, but it doesn't mean that He is denying our prayers.

Often the Lord has special reasons for doing so, and He will grant our request at the most fitting time. There's an appointed time for deliverance to be granted. If we could take things in our own hands, we would deal foolishly. To use the example of a wound, you may have a bandage upon the wound. Now you can remove the bandage quickly and pull it off before the wound will be healed, while it would be better to leave the bandage there for a while, and then remove it.

The Lord also knows the best time to hear our prayers. You'll find an example of that in the Canaanite woman. The Lord meant to grant her request, and yet He postponed it so that she would cry more and more, so that her faith would increase. The Lord can withhold blessing so that we would be praying more fervently to receive it and that when the answer is given, we would realize this is God's work, not because of our doings.

Then we will value and esteem these blessings so greatly. Sometimes, the Lord can withhold an answer to humble us more because often God's people need to learn humility. They need to learn their weakness, their inability, like Joseph, who was a godly young man. But he was left for years in prison until the time was ready when he would be delivered, so he could be vice regent of Egypt and would be suitable and qualified to deliver his own family from famine.

He was taught patience and humility. At times, we are tempted to consider God's delaying an answer as a flat denial, and this hinders prayer. Well, at times, the Lord can deny us something, but the Lord also has something better in store for us. God does not grant all our requests. Think of Moses, how he pleaded with the Lord that he could enter the promised land in Deuteronomy 3. The Lord denied his request, but gave him something far better.

He will be taken up into glory, into [the] heavenly Canaan. Paul prayed that he might be delivered from this painful thorn in the flesh. He prayed three times for that, but the Lord said that His grace, God's grace, will be sufficient for him (II Corinthians 12:7-9). A thorn can make a person be humble and [keep a person] humble, that they would not elevate themselves. You see what Psalm 84:11 says, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

If it serves their good, God will not withhold any request from the upright. Let this be an encouragement for believing prayer, an encouragement to receive spiritual blessings for conversion, for growth and grace, for the saving of our families, for revival in our church and country. The Lord knows what is good better than we do. God is free in how He answers, but He will [answer] in His own time.

There are also certain struggles in prayer life. It's good to be aware of that. We mentioned in our last lecture, the 19th and 20th century English missionary in Southwest China, James Fraser. He experienced extensive spiritual struggles all related to prayer and his personal relationship to the Lord.

Fraser, a godly missionary giving himself to the service of the Lord and laboring hard in difficult circumstances, experienced severe depression as he labored for years on his own, proclaiming a gospel that nobody wanted to hear. He was suffering from a depressing sense of loneliness caused by daily routine of arduous study as he was alone with his books. Because of all this, he slackened in his daily communion with God. He describes that to us. The aim of this assault of the devil was to cut off communication with God; and to accomplish this, the devil diluted the soul of Fraser with a sense of defeat.

He covered him with a thick cloud of darkness. The satanic powers depress and oppress the spirit of God's child, and this in turn hinders prayer. It leads to unbelief; it destroys spiritual power in a child of God. This is something Fraser vividly experienced, and a strange and sinister shadow came upon him. He was perplexed; he found himself in deepening gloom. He was assailed by deep and treacherous doubts. Repeatedly, he was assaulted by thoughts such as, 'Your prayers are not answered. No one wants to hear your message. You better leave it all.'

He was even attacked by suicidal thoughts. The powers of darkness had Fraser isolated, and then he saw what was happening to him. He saw that it was a clear assault of satanic power, and then he offered deliberate resistance, definite resistance pleading the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. This worked, and immediately the powers of darkness had to let go of him. The cloud of depression dispersed, he claimed deliverance on the ground of his Redeemer's victory on the Cross.

He even shouted his resistance to Satan, and all his dark thoughts collapsed there and then like a pack of cards to return no more. He experienced relief by repeating out loud appropriate verses of Scripture. It was like

crashing through opposition. He experienced what we read in James 4:7, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” The devil had tried to isolate him to hinder his prayers.

Fraser experienced [that] we are not only to resist the devil or to resist sin, but we are also called to deliberately resist discouragement in prayer because prayer is the only weapon to drive back the forces of darkness. In his prayer life, James Fraser tells us how he at times could experience deep, personal communion with God. He felt the need of trusting the Lord to lead him in prayer, as well as in other matters. He experienced what Psalm 25 tells us, “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him” (verse 14). Those who live closest to the Lord will understand His will.

We must pray to know His will. Too often, Christian leaders, pastors, they make their own plans. They work hard at them, and then earnestly ask God’s blessing upon them. It’s much better to wait on God in prayer and to know His plans before commencing. We must receive our prayers from God, and He will lead us in such prayer. It’s better to strive to know His will, and once we have the deep, calm assurance of His will in this matter, we put our claim in before God like a child does to his father.

That’s prayer of faith, and the devil detests such prayer because for the devil such prayer is an authoritative notice to retreat. He does not mind so much rambling, carnal prayers. They don’t hurt him much, but prayer of faith, wrestling before the Lord for an answer, that is important. Fraser also saw the need for personal discipline in regards to personal prayer. He found it very important to get up early before the day becomes lively, and before yours will be entangled with all kinds of activities of daily life.

Fraser found various places in the hills where he could pray. He had different places for different types of weather. He would be in caves, or in temples that were forsaken, where no one would be. That’s where he would be to pray to God. He would pray aloud, talking as a man talks to his friend. He would kneel in prayer. At times, he would walk up and down as he was praying. Prayer is the most important task for a Christian, and that’s why the devil attacks specifically this life of prayer.

The devil is fond [of letting] us wait for better opportunities and tells us to use the words “if” or “when,” so that we would put off prayer now. He tempts us to see ‘if there are better circumstances,’ or ‘when we have more time to pray,’ but the Scriptures never tell us to do that; we are to serve now, in the things that need to be done now, and so the Lord bids us to work, watch, and pray, but the devil suggests us to wait for a better opportunity.

Needless to say, this opportunity always lies in the future. Fraser realized [that for] the kingdom of God, carnal weapons are unable to gain the victory. Human willpower will not gain the victory. Carnal energy is no weapon in spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness. Yet, all the powers of hell are unable to annul the powerful influence of consistent, believing prayer. Fraser remarked that serving in God’s kingdom is a spiritual battle, and we must be prepared for serious spiritual warfare.

We need God’s strength for that, not our natural strength, but we may lean upon God’s everlasting arms and renew our strength continually (Deuteronomy 33:27 and Isaiah 40:31). Fraser wrote in his diary that we must pray through every aspect of our work in detail to receive the knowledge of His will, to gain wisdom in how to deal with people, grace to instruct people in the gospel. We need grace even in ordinary conversations, and certainly we need grace in preaching.

We need guidance regarding daily matters, and so we must mention our workers, the leaders, the helpers by name. Everything is dependent on God’s blessing, and such a detailed prayer is exhausting, but yet it is effectual to ascertain the will of God, and to obtain His highest blessing. In his prayer life, Fraser also became aware of defeats he suffered, such as discouragement, listlessness, or impatience.

He experienced that the indwelling of Christ was his most successful weapon against all kinds of sin. He drew strength from the living communion with God. And in these struggles, Fraser realized that you can be so entangled in the busyness of daily life that you’re unable to struggle and that the enemy is keeping you down. It’s a subtle trick of the enemy to get us occupied with superficial concerns like book selling, or language study, running a mission station, writing reports, correspondence, keeping accounts, building repairs, buying things, reading.

And so, you’re so busy with all kinds of secondary and trivial concerns that you neglect the primary calling: prayer. At times we can be working like people whose ship is stranded on a sandbank. You can push, but the ship stays there. You can do all your work, but it doesn’t help. The tide must come in; the grace of God must come in.

We need to pray, and that brings the tide in. At times you can go through struggles that the temptation tells you: 'I must give up, I can't go on anymore.'

Yet, God renews your strength, because you seek grace and strength from Him. If it is that we fall into certain sins, remember 1 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." When you suffer opposition from others, remember Jeremiah 1:19, "They shall fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you to deliver you."

The Lord will undertake for you. That's why prayer is of utmost importance. To mention again the experience of James Fraser, he first thought that prayer should have the first place, and that teaching [should have] the second place, but he then started to see that prayer should have the first, the second, and the third place, and then teaching the fourth place. He learned that by experience, by toiling for months and years with no fruit.

But then by prayer and a simple witness, miracles happened. It's like dry bones, and the Lord breathes into them (Ezekiel 37:1-14), and the outpouring of God's Spirit takes place. People become convicted of sin, and there is a revelation of the Lord Jesus to their hearts. It's a sign of the outpouring of God's Spirit, and they understand the truth, and God's love is poured out in their heart. They are anointed with power from God to resist evil, and you know God is willing to give these outpourings of His Spirit, willing to give far above what we stand in need of.

To overcome all these difficulties in prayer, and to receive the outpouring of God's Spirit, there are certain characteristics needed in prayer life. What are the characteristics in prayer that we should exercise ourselves in? They are humility, faith, love, and patience. The Lord has a special regard to those who are humble. The proud he knows afar off; the humble soul has high views of God, and low thoughts of himself (Psalm 138:6).

If the angels in heaven humble themselves, how much more should we who have sinned humble ourselves before God. Besides humility, there's also faith. There should be confidence and trust that God will give far above what we deserve. Nothing is too hard for Him, and although all other helps will fail, His arm will bring salvation (Isaiah 59:16). We may rest upon His promises, and let there also be love.

Let us have love to our fellow brethren. Let us not harbor any wrong and ill feelings to them. Let us exercise love to the Lord, knowing His love, what He has done, and that we, in the spirit of love, should pour out our heart before the Lord. Also having patience, persevering in prayer. Praying for God's Spirit continually, not giving up.

Realizing God will hear like David said, "I will wait patiently for the Lord." Then we also see what he says in Psalm 40:1, "He inclined his ear unto me, and he heard my cries." You see, be patient in prayers and be encouraged, because the Lord Jesus is our Advocate in heaven (1 John 2:1). We may have access to God the Father by the Spirit and through the Son. And God will give far above what we need, or will even pray for. Thank you.