

UNIT 3.A.: SEEKING TRUTH: PRAYER, STUDY & FASTING

Objective: In seeking to become disciples of Christ and a sanctified people, this sets us on a quest for greater truth, which can only come from God's revealed mind and will. Through prayer, we seek to establish a relationship with the Creator. Through scripture study, we learn what he has said previously down through history. Through fasting, we attempt to become instruments in his hand to heal the brokenness and lift the burdens of this world.

D & C 9:3 (revelation delivered to Oliver Cowdery about discernment):

Behold, you [Oliver] have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought, save it was to ask me. But, behold, I say unto you, that you must **study it out** in your mind. Then you must **ask me if it be right**, and if it is right, I will cause that **your bosom shall burn within you**; therefore, **you shall feel that it is right**. But if it be not right, you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have **a stupor of thought**, that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong . . .

D & C 18:4a (delivered to Martin Harris):

And again, I command thee that thou shalt **pray vocally** as well as in thy heart; before the world as well as **in secret**; **in public** as well as **in private**.

D & C 21:5a (delivered to Joseph Knight):

. . . **pray vocally** before the world, as well as **in secret**, and in your family, and among your friends, and **in all places**.

Alma 12:3-5:

For they were men of a sound understanding, and they had **searched the scriptures** diligently, that they might know the word of God. But this is not all: they had given themselves to **much prayer and fasting**, therefore they had the spirit of **prophecy** and the spirit of **revelation**, and when they taught, **they taught with power and authority**, even as with the power and authority of God.

Alma 3:71-80:

. . . I speak in the energy of my soul . . . For I am called to speak after this manner . . . Yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people . . . Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? **Behold, I testify unto you, that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken, are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?** Behold, I say unto you, They are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, **I have fasted and prayed many days**, that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is **the spirit of revelation** which is in me.

Numbers 11:29:

. . . **would God that all the Lord's people were prophets**, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them.

2 Nephi 14:11-12:

For if ye would hearken unto the spirit which teacheth a man to pray, ye would know that **ye must pray: for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.**

But behold I say unto you, that **ye must pray always, and not faint: that ye must not perform anything unto the Lord, save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ**, that he will **consecrate thy performance** unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.

PRAYER

3 Nephi 8:50-57 (Jesus to 2,500 Nephites):

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto his disciples, **he turned again unto the multitude, and said unto them**, Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, **Ye must watch and pray always, lest ye enter into temptation. For Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name**; and whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you. **Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed.** And behold, ye shall meet together oft, and **ye shall not forbid any man from coming unto you when ye shall meet together**, but suffer them that they may come unto you, and forbid them not. But **ye shall pray for them, and shall not cast them out**; and if it so be that they come unto you oft, **ye shall pray for them unto the Father, in my name**; therefore hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold **I am the light which ye shall hold up** -- that which ye have seen me do. Behold ye see that **I have prayed unto the Father, and ye all have witnessed; and ye see that I have commanded that none of you should go away**, but rather have commanded that ye should come unto me, that ye might feel and see. **Even so shall ye do unto the world**; and whosoever breaketh this commandment, suffereth himself to be led into temptation.

Alma 17:68-70:

O remember my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God; yea, and **cry unto God for all thy support**. Yea, let all **thy doings** be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest, let it be in the Lord; yea, let **thy thoughts** be directed unto the Lord; yea, let **the affections of thy heart** be placed upon the Lord forever; **counsel the Lord in all thy doings**, and he will direct thee for good. Yea, **when thou liest down at night**, lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and **when thou riseth in the morning**, let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

1 Timothy 2:1-2:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, **supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving thanks**, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty.

NINE ASPECTS OF THE "LORD'S PRAYER"

Matthew 9-15:

Therefore **after this manner shall ye pray, saying**,

Our Father who art in heaven, **Hallowed be thy name.**
Thy **kingdom** come.
Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And **forgive us** our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And suffer us not to be led into **temptation**, but deliver us from evil.
For **thine is** the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

When we have our minds set on getting something from somebody, we often have a habit of quickly ingratiating ourselves with them to get on their good side and then we tell them what we really want. **When we pray to God, we frequently spend a brief moment praising him and then get right to the requests.** This is kind of like a child saying, “Mom, you look beautiful today, can I have a piece of candy?”

This is very similar to a list of requests a child might present to a Santa Claus at a shopping center. Parents listen off to the side, and they know it’s their responsibility to make those wishes come true.

When children used to put a nickel in a gumball machine, they expected it to spit out a gumball. If it didn’t, something was wrong. The next step would be to assume it was jammed. They might hit the machine until something came out.

When we finally get around to prayers at night, it might be the last thing we do. We’re often so tired we have just enough energy to mutter a few requests about concerns that are weighing on our hearts and then go to sleep.

In an effort to make our prayer time seem less like we’re talking to a gumball machine, it might be good for us to consider the different aspects of prayer that are available to us:

1. PRAISE

“Hallowed be thy name.” The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6 immediately **gives praise and honor to him**. We start our prayer by drawing a distinction between the Creator and his creatures. He is holy; we are not. He is great; we are merely his creation. This puts the relationship between God and people in proper perspective. How do we distinguish between God and man? By God’s attributes! **In praising him, we identify his many attributes that set him apart from every aspect of his creation.** He is distinct. He is unique. There is no person or thing like him in the universe. He alone is worthy of our adoration.

2. THANKS

“Hallowed by thy name.” After we’ve praised God for his attributes, there is *a second aspect* of hallowing his name that involves **recognizing him as the giver of all good gifts**. In giving him credit for the blessings in our lives, we recognize specific moments when his power was evident and intervened on our behalf. In doing this, we confess that he is there and acting for our benefit. We memorialize those times when he moved in power. In doing this we recognize the fact that our loving Heavenly Father wants the very best for his children.

3. KINGDOM

“Thy kingdom come.” We want to let God know that **we long for Zion, where he will sovereignly reign over all the earth**. Every day, one small step at a time, we are engaged in bringing this world into subjection to the Lord of the universe. Each day, we should pray that we might come one step closer to

God's kingdom, that it might become a reality in our lifetime. **In doing this I put him in charge and recognize his rightful place as the ruler in my life.**

4. GUIDANCE (ASKING FOR DIRECTION AS TO GOD'S WILL)

"Thy will be done . . ." As we kneel before our Creator, we come humbly before his throne asking, **"What is your will, Lord? What would you have me do?"** Every day of our lives, we're engaged in a spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil. When we must fight an enemy, we want to know if the cause we're fighting for is the will of our Creator. Soldiers don't want to put their lives on the line unless they feel confident they're fighting for a righteous cause. They need clarity. They need to see a stark contrast between right and wrong. If I can better discern God's will, I then have my marching orders. I can go forth confident in his presence to aid me.

Joshua 1:9:

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for **the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.**

5. HELP (ASKING FOR THE DESIRE & POWER TO ACT ON HIS WILL)

"Give us this day . . ." In addition to knowing God's will, I must recognize **my utter dependence upon him to give me desire and strength**. Some people think of this as the selfish aspect of prayer in which we say "gimme this and gimme that." It's normally the part that we tend to start off with in our prayers. God's grace is "the desire and power to do his will." I need his power, his strength, his might. He is the engine. He must instill the **desire** in me to do his will. He must give me the **power** to do it. **We call this "God's grace."** When he gives us bread, that gives us physical power. When he plants a righteous desire in our hearts, that gives us spiritual power. His strength is made perfect in our weakness. The more we depend upon him, the greater the glory that is given to him. He is magnified.

6. INTERCESSION FOR OTHERS

"Give us this day . . ." After recognizing our dependence on God for his blessings, there is *a second aspect* of "give us this day . . ." that concerns **the needs of others**. In praying for help from God we want to ask him to help others as well. We know what our needs are, but the needs of others are a little more difficult to track. It might be a good idea to keep a list of notes with names and needs listed on our cell phones. We want to constantly be in touch with the needs of the body of Christ.

7. CONFESSION

"And forgive us . . ." In recognizing our dependence upon God for his strength, we become aware of **the gap that separates a holy God and us as sinners**. Only the blood of Jesus Christ could close that gap. His atoning sacrifice met the demands of God's justice. His blood was shed on our behalf as an act of God's mercy. In Jesus we find forgiveness of sin.

8. PROTECTION

"Suffer us not to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil." After we've found forgiveness, it should be our desire to **change the pattern of sin in our lives**. But all too often we return to our old ways like "a dog is turned to his own vomit again" (2 Peter 2:22). We are weak and need God's hand of

providence to protect us from a temptation that is beyond our own strength to resist. We need his grace to help us resist.

9. PRAISE & YIELDING OWNERSHIP TO HIM

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.” After recognizing a need for God’s protection, I come before his throne one more time to **recognize his ownership and make an offering of praise**. Our prayers should be “a praise sandwich” in which we begin and end with praise (e.g., recognize his attributes). Regarding:

- His kingdom – He will one day reign over his creation.
- His power – He is the source of all power, the one we depend upon.
- His glory – He deserves all of the glory for every good thing in this world.

We want to proclaim this to the world. When his kingdom comes, we don’t want it to be short-lived. We want God to rule. We want to be free of the snare of sin forever, that we might live in peace with him for eternity.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR PRAYERS

The effectiveness of our prayers to God is influenced by a number of factors. A significant aspect of effectiveness has to do with following the instructions God has given us regarding our prayer life.

John 5:16:

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. **The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**

Matthew 6:1, 5, 7-8:

. . . as Jesus taught his disciples, he said unto the, Take heed that ye do not **your alms** before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in heaven . . . And **when thou prayest**, thou shalt not be as the **hypocrites**; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, **that they may be seen of men**; for, verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou prayest, **enter into thy closet** . . . But when ye pray, **use not vain repetitions**, as the hypocrites do . . . for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him

Alma 16:219-224:

Yea, **humble yourselves**, and continue in prayer unto him; **cry unto him** when ye are in your **fields**; yea, over all your **flocks**; cry unto him in your **houses**, yea, over all your **household**, both **morning, mid-day, and evening**; yea, cry unto him against the power of your **enemies**; yea, cry unto him against **the devil**, who is an enemy to all righteousness. Cry unto him over the **crops** of your fields, that ye may prosper in them: cry over the **flocks** of your fields, that they may increase. But this is not all: ye must **pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness**. Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, **let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually** for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you. And now behold, my brethren, I say unto you, Do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, **if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance if ye have, to those who stand in need. I say unto you, If ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith.**

MORNING PRAYER

Alma 17:70:

. . . and **when thou riseth in the morning, let thy heart be full of thanks unto God**; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

Alma 16:219-224:

Yea, **humble yourselves**, and continue in prayer unto him; **cry unto him** when ye are in your **fields**; yea, over all your **flocks**; cry unto him in your **houses**, yea, over all your household, both **morning, mid-day, and evening**;

EVENING PRAYER

Alma 17:70:

Yea, **when thou liest down at night, lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep** . . . and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

3 Nephi 9:24-28 & 38:

. . . when Jesus had thus prayed unto the Father, he came unto his **disciples**, and behold, **they did still continue, without ceasing, to pray unto him; and they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire** . . . and **his countenance did smile upon them**, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold **they were as white as the countenance, and also the garments of Jesus**. And behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof. And Jesus said unto them, **Pray on**; nevertheless **they did not cease to pray**. And he turned from them again, and went a little way off, and bowed himself to the earth; and **he prayed again unto the Father**, saying, Father, **I thank thee that thou hast purified these whom I have chosen, because of their faith** . . . and he commanded them that they **should not cease to pray in their hearts**.

THAT IS THE END OF UNIT 3.A. SEEKING TRUTH – PRAYER, STUDY & FASTING.