

Chapter Eleven



*The Believer's Fellowship
With God*

XI. THE BELIEVER'S FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Introduction: An old Vermont farmer was asked how his spiritual life was progressing. He puffed on his pipe thoughtfully a moment and then replied, "Well, the Lord and I haven't come to a complete fall out as yet." For many people this is about all that can be said for their relationship to God—it hasn't completely deteriorated yet, but it certainly isn't in too good shape either. But being a Christian should be the deepest and finest of all relationships. Through Christ, a Christian achieves fellowship with God and dwells in the fullness of His love and grace. This highest of all relationships should be nourished and deepened in every possible way. This chapter discusses how a Christian can and ought to draw closer to God and grow up in every way into the fullness of Christian life.

- 1. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NOURISHED AND GROWS BY HOLDING FAST TO CHRIST IN FAITH, AND BY FEEDING ON HIS WORD.** THE WORD OF GOD (ESPECIALLY THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL) IS THE MEANS BY WHICH A PERSON BECOMES A CHRISTIAN, BUT IT IS ALSO THE ESSENTIAL MEANS BY WHICH SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS ACHIEVED. CHRIST IS THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL, AND IT IS BY HOLDING FAST TO HIM, AND HIS WORD, IN FAITH, THAT WE REMAIN CHRISTIANS AND GROW SPIRITUALLY.

John 14:23-24 Jesus replied, "**If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.** My Father will love him, and **we will come to him** and make our home with him. **He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.** These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." (NIV)

I Tim. 4:16 Pay close attention to yourself **and to your teaching; continue in these things,** for in doing this **you will save both yourself and your hearers.** (NRSV) (Paul, to Timothy)

2. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE. WE HAVE TASTED GOD'S LOVE FOR US; WE IN TURN LOVE GOD, AND WE ALSO NOW LOVE ONE ANOTHER. BUT OUR LOVE FOR GOD, AND FOR MANKIND, IS NOT A MATTER OF EXERCISING WILL POWER—RATHER, IT IS A MATTER OF **accepting God's love into our hearts**, AND PERMITTING HIS LOVE TO TRANSFORM US INWARDLY, AND **then extend out from us, to others**. TO PERMIT GOD'S LOVE TO SO PERMEATE OUR LIVES THAT IT NOT ONLY WARMS US, BUT GOES THROUGH US, AND WARMS OTHERS—THIS IS THE HEALTHY EXPRESSION OF A VITAL CHRISTIAN LIFE. TO REFUSE **to extend** GOD'S LOVE TO OTHERS IS TO DIE INWARDLY YOURSELF. LOVE IS NOT MERELY A FEELING: IT INVOLVES THE WILL. THAT IS WHY GOD **commands** US TO LOVE. THUS CHRISTIAN LOVE IS AN ACT OF OBEDIENCE.

I Cor. 14:1 Make love your aim... (RSV)

I John 3:23-24 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. (NRSV)

I John 4:7-12 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. **Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.** Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. **Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** No one has ever seen God; but **if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.** (NIV)

3. PRAYER, TOO, IS A NATURAL AND VITAL EXPRESSION OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

A. As long as the Spirit of Christ dwells within our hearts, we will pray *EVEN AS JESUS, GOD'S BELOVED SON, CONSTANTLY COMMUNED WITH HIS FATHER IN PRAYER.*

Mark 1:35 And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. (RSV)

Rom. 8:15-16 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (NIV)

*(The term "Abba" is the word little Jewish children used when addressing their fathers. It is equivalent to our "daddy" and expresses affection.)

Rom. 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.... The Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (RSV)

B. Sometimes prayer is hard work. *TO PRAY WE MUST STRUGGLE AGAINST OUR DOUBTS, OUR LAZINESS, AND SOMETIMES AGAINST A GUILTY CONSCIENCE THAT TELLS US WE ARE UNWORTHY TO PRAY. THE CHRISTIAN'S COURAGE TO PRAY COMES FROM Christ's invitation and encouragement TO PRAY; FROM HIS PROMISE TO HEAR US; AND FROM the assurance that our sins are forgiven, AND OUR PRAYERS ARE THEREFORE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD.*

Matt. 6:5-6 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and **your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**" (RSV)

3.B. Prayer (Cont'd)

Matt. 7:7-11 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (NIV)

Luke 18:1 And he told them a parable, to the effect that **they ought always to pray and not lose heart.** (RSV) (see entire parable)

John 16:23-24 "On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete." (NRSV)

Note: To pray "**in the name of Jesus**" means to pray "in the strength of what He has done." By His sacrificial death Christ has removed our sins and thus makes us worthy to be heard by God. When we pray in His name, we say in effect, "God, I do not deserve that for which I pray, but grant it to me because of the life and death of your Son on my behalf."

God's Unusual "Angel"

(An orphan girl, whose bedroom is in an attic, is frightened of rats.)

"O God, keep me safe from the rats."

"There was no need to send an angel from heaven in answer to this little one's prayer: the cat would do. Annie heard a scratch and a mew at the door. The rats made one frantic scramble, and were still..."

"Fortified by the cat's arrival, and still more by the feeling that it was a divine messenger sent to succor her because she had prayed, she sprang out of bed, darted across the room, and opened the door to let her in. A few moments and she was fast asleep, guarded by God's angel, the cat, for whose entrance she took good care ever after to leave the door ajar."

"There are ways of keeping the door of the mind also, ready as it is to fall to, ajar for the cat."

— George MacDonald, *Selections From His Greatest Works*, compiled by David L. Neuhouser, #233, p. 89, Victor Books, A Division of Scripture Press, 1990.

3. Prayer (Cont'd)

C. A Prayer MAY CONSIST OF ONE OR MORE ELEMENTS WHICH EXPRESS THE VARIOUS LONGINGS AND NEEDS OF OUR HEART:

1. **Adoration and Praise:** We praise and honor God for the way He is and for what He's done.
2. **Thanksgiving:** We thank God for His gifts, love and grace.
3. **Intercession:** We pray for others and their needs, even plead for them.
4. **Petition:** A request in which we ask God for something.

Ps. 113:3-4 From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of **the LORD is to be praised**. The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. (Praise) (NRSV)

Phil. 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, **by prayer and petition**, with **thanksgiving**, present your **requests** to God. (Petition) (NIV)

I Th. 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, **give thanks in all circumstances**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (Thanksgiving) (NRSV)

I Tim. 2:1-2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, **intercessions**, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. (Intercession) (NRSV)

3. Prayer (Cont'd)

D. If our prayer is not answered *IN THE WAY OR TIME THAT WE HAD HOPED, IT IS WELL TO REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING THINGS:*

1. Prayer is not a means of ruling the universe. We should first listen to God's Word, accept it, and then our prayer becomes a response to God as He really is, and not as we might ignorantly assume Him to be. All prayer and its results must agree with God's gracious and loving will for us and others.
2. Though God may not answer every prayer in the way that we had hoped, He does promise to hear our prayer, and sometimes, if He does not answer in quite the way we expected, He may grant an even finer answer than we requested.

3.D. Prayer (Cont'd)

3. When asking for spiritual gifts and blessings, such as greater love, patience, or strength to overcome temptations, we know this is in accord with God's will, and therefore we may ask unconditionally. But when asking for material things, or **for things we have doubts about, then we should ask conditionally, that is, with the words, "if it be Your will" added to our prayer.**

Matt. 8:2-3 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, **if you are willing, you can** make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. (NIV)

Luke 22:42 "Father, **if you are willing**, take this cup from me; yet **not my will, but yours** be done." (Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.) (NIV)

Rom. 8:27 ...the Spirit intercedes for the saints **according to the will of God.** (NRSV)

II Cor. 12:8-9a Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (Paul's prayer for the removal of an affliction.) (NIV)

I John 3:21-2 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that **we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another**, just as he has commanded us. (NRSV)

I John 5:14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that **if we ask anything according to his will**, he hears us. (NIV)

3. (Cont'd)

E. Prayer Attitudes. *THE BEST PRAYER IS A Response to God's Word. THEN IT IS LIKE A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION. THE LESS WE LISTEN TO GOD, THE LESS WE HAVE TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT. ALSO, it is important that we pray with the right attitude SO THAT OUR PRAYERS WILL NOT BE HINDERED BY OUR PRIDE, GREED, SELFISHNESS, OR DOUBT. NOTE THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES WHICH SHOW US there is a right way and a wrong way to pray.*

Ps. 66:18 **If I had cherished iniquity in my heart**, the Lord would not have listened. (NRSV)

Dan. 9:18 Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. **We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness**, but on the ground of your great mercies. (Daniel's humble prayer.) (NRSV)

Matt. 6:7-8 "When you are praying, **do not heap up empty phrases** as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Thoughtless, manipulative prayer) (NRSV)

Luke 18:11-12 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' (Pride and condemnation of others.) (NIV)

Jas. 1:5-6 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God and it will be given him, for God is a generous giver who neither grudges nor reproaches anyone. **But he who asks must ask in faith, with never a doubt in his mind**; for the doubter is like waves of the sea tossed hither and thither by the wind. (REB)

Jas. 4:2b-3 ...You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because **you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures**. (NIV)

Jas. 5:16b-18 The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. (fervent prayer) (NIV)

I Pet. 3:7 Husbands, in the same way, **show consideration for your wives in your life together**, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—**so that nothing may hinder your prayers**. (NRSV)

4. ANOTHER VITAL ASPECT OF THE BELIEVER'S COMMUNION WITH GOD IS WORSHIP. PRAYER ITSELF IS AN ACT OF WORSHIP, BUT SO IS LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD, AND SO IS SINGING A HYMN OF PRAISE. AND, IN A WIDER SENSE, **all that we do with conscious regard for God's will, and to His glory, is an act of worship**, FOR THE BASIC MEANING OF THE WORD "WORSHIP" IS SERVICE IN BOTH THE ORIGINAL HEBREW AND GREEK. THEREFORE, WHENEVER AND WHEREVER WE **serve God**, WE **worship Him**. THUS A CHRISTIAN CAN PLEASE GOD ALSO IN HIS DAILY LABOR, AND "WORSHIP" GOD IN HIS LIFE'S VOCATION.

Matt. 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall **worship** the Lord your God and him only shall you **serve**.'" (RSV)

John 4:23-24 "...the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must **worship in spirit and in truth**." (NIV)

John 12:26 "Whoever **serves me must follow me**, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever **serves me**, the Father will **honor**." (NRSV)

Rom. 12:1 "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (NRSV)

Eph. 6:5-7 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but **like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men**. (NIV)

Col. 3:16-17 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. **And whatever you do, in word or deed**, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (NRSV)

5. IT IS THROUGH CHRIST THE BELIEVER HAS FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, AND BY FAITH IN CHRIST, GOD'S LIFE BECOMES OUR OWN AND HE DWELLS IN US AND PERFORMS HIS WILL THROUGH US. THE MOST CRUCIAL THING OF ALL THEN, FOR THE CHRISTIAN, IS TO HOLD FAST TO CHRIST, TRUST IN HIM AS OUR SAVIOR, AND SERVE HIM AS OUR LORD.

John 5:22-23 "The Father...has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father." (NRSV)

John 15:1-2 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." (NRSV)

John 15:4 "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." (NRSV)

John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." (NRSV)

John 15:6 "Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned." (NRSV)

John 15:8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." (NRSV)

John 15:9 "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." (NRSV)

I John 5:10-12 Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (NIV)

Jude 1:20-21 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. (NIV)

THE LORD'S PRAYER

(Including Luther's Explanation in a Contemporary Translation)

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN.

What does this mean?

Here God encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father and we are His children. We therefore are to pray to Him with complete confidence just as children speak to their loving father.

HALLOWED BE THY NAME.

What does this mean?

God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that we may keep it holy.

When does this happen?

God's name is hallowed whenever His Word is rightly taught and we as children of God live in harmony with it. Help us to do this, Heavenly Father! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to the Word of God, dishonors God's name among us. Keep us from doing this, Heavenly Father!

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Thy Kingdom Come

Where His Word is believed, God rules, and where God rules His Kingdom is present.

Thy Kingdom Come

Picture yourself ushered before God, and He says to you, "I have appointed my Son, Jesus, to rule over you as a gracious, wise, and loving king. I want you to give to Him the total allegiance of your heart. And then I want you to serve Him day by day in whatever task or place He assigns you. If He places you in a lowly position, where you are to work alone, without anyone noticing your efforts, nonetheless, I want you to serve Him faithfully.

"Everything you do, must be done with conscious regard for the will and purposes of that King whom I have placed over you. If you are given a task that is public, impressive, and which wins admiration and praise for you, I want you to keep a very careful watch on your heart that you do not seek this praise for yourself or become proud. No, you must acknowledge your dependence on Jesus at all times before all people, and you are to keep your eyes fastened on Him, and your ears attuned to His Word. You are to make it your only concern to please Him and to render to Him a glad and faithful service."

– H. F. Fingerlin

Thy Will be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven

"God has given an independent will neither to you nor to anybody else, for self-will comes from the devil and Adam. These two turned their free will, received from God, into a will of their own; for a free will is one which has no desires of its own but constantly looks to the will of God. In this way it then also succeeds in remaining free, clinging and cleaving to nothing.

"Now you notice that in this petition God bids us pray against ourselves, thereby teaching us that we have no greater enemy than ourselves. Our will is the greatest Power within us. But we must pray against it. 'O Father let me not so fall as to do things according to my own will. Break my will. Restrain my will. Let come what may, only let my lot be determined not by my will but only by Thy will; for so it is in heaven, where there is no self-will. Let it be so also on earth.' Putting this prayer into practice is very painful to human nature."

– Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, Vol. III, p. 1444.

Thy Will Be Done

*Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me,
And the changes that are sure to come
I do not fear to see;
But I ask Thee for a present mind,
Intent on pleasing Thee.*

*I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro,
Seeking for some great thing to do,
Or secret thing to know;
I would be treated as a child,
And guided where I go.*

– Author Unknown

THE LORD'S PRAYER

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION.

What does this mean?

God tempts no one to sin, but we ask in this prayer that God would watch over us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful self may not deceive us and draw us into unbelief, despair, and other great shameful sins.

And we pray that even though we are so tempted we may still win the final victory.

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BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.

What does this mean?

We ask in this inclusive prayer that our Heavenly Father would save us from every evil to body and soul, and at our last hour would mercifully take us from the troubles of this world to Himself in heaven.

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.

What does "Amen" mean?

Amen, means yes, it shall be so. We say Amen because we are certain that such petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven. For He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us.

— Ibid., p. 150.

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER XI

1. On the basis of this lesson, can you answer the following questions?
 1. How is spiritual growth in a Christian accomplished?
 2. How does Christ ask us to express our Love for Him?
 3. How is **Christian** love different from what is regarded as love in this world?
 4. Why is prayer a natural, and indispensable part of a Christian's life?
 5. Give at least three reasons why a Christian should maintain an active prayer life.
 6. What does it mean to pray, "in the name of Jesus"?
 7. What various **elements** may be present in prayer? (Petition, etc.)
 8. Give some reasons why a prayer may not be answered precisely in the way that we requested.
 9. Give a reason why a prayer may not be answered at all.
 10. Give some **right and wrong attitudes** that should or should not accompany prayer.
2. A Christian should follow the example set for us by Jesus. Look up the following passages and find out what we should learn from Jesus' example. Fill in the blanks using your own words.
 1. Read Luke 2:41-51. What example does Jesus give us in verse 46? _____

What example in verse 49? _____
What example in verse 51? _____
 2. Read Matthew 4:1-11. What example does Jesus give us in verse 4? _____

What example in verses 6-7? _____
What examples in verses 9-10? _____
 3. Read Matthew 11:25-29. What example does Jesus give us in verse 25? _____

According to verse 29, what characteristics of Christ's personality should we also have?

 4. Read Matthew 14:13-14. What attitude does Jesus here display that we also need to show?

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER XI (PAGE 2)

5. Read Matthew 26:36-44. What do we learn from Jesus' prayer in verse 39? _____

What does Jesus teach us about prayer in verse 41? _____

What does Jesus teach us about prayer in verse 44? _____

 6. What can we learn from Jesus' example as it is given us in Mark 1:35? _____

 7. What example does Jesus give us in Luke 4:16? _____

 8. Read Luke 23:32-34. What example does Jesus' prayer give us? _____

 9. What example does Jesus give us in John 19:24-27? _____

 10. Read John 21:15-17. What is the basic question that Jesus asks Peter three different times?

What command does Jesus give Peter in verse 15? _____
What command does Jesus give Peter in verse 17? _____
3. Read John 15:1-11, and see if you can answer the following questions:
1. The True Vine is: _____
 2. The Vinedresser is: _____
 3. The branches are: _____
 4. According to verse 4, what makes the branch bear fruit? _____

 5. According to verse 6, what happens to branches that do not abide in Christ? _____

 6. According to verse 8, how is the Father glorified? _____
