

Learning from the Master

by Jim Johns

Part 2

Lessons from the Prayer Life of Jesus

This article is the second in a series on the Prayer Life of Jesus. In the first article, we examined the elements of His earthly prayer life as described in Hebrews 5:7-10. Here we turn to the first of two significant Scriptural examples that graphically illustrate the important place that prayer occupied in the carrying out of His earthly assignment.

Why did Jesus pray? Was He not divine? Did He not know the Father's will for Him from the very beginning of His life?

Those are questions that naturally arise as we examine the prayer life of Jesus. The truth is that there are no easy answers. Because we are finite creatures, we can never fully understand those things we encounter as infinite. We cannot understand the Trinity (how can three be one, and one three?) We do not grasp what Paul means as he writes in Philippians 2 that Christ "made himself nothing" (or "emptied himself," as the King James Version says) in order to leave heaven for earth and take on Himself the form of a human servant. How much emptying did He do?

In the same way, we cannot know how much Jesus, in His earthly journey, knew of His own nature. He seemed to know, from his childhood, that He was on mission for God ("I must be about my Father's business" [Luke 2:49], age 12). More than once, He predicted His own impending death (Mark 8:31, 10:33; Luke 18:31-33) with clear description of the what, the how and the why. What did He *not* know?

While these are perplexing, if significant, theological questions, we must rely on the evidence of Scripture to guide us through those deep waters where there is much we cannot know for certain. And what we can discover in Scripture is that Jesus *prayed*. If there is a single dominant characteristic of His life, it is that He prayed. Prayer was the indispensable fact of His relationship with His heavenly Father.

What should an understanding of His prayer life say to us as His present-day disciples? Are there some fundamental truths for those of us who really desire to follow our Lord and begin to live the life of prayer that links us to the heavenly Father in the same way?

Truth #1: It was in prayer that Jesus learned the Father's will

We know this from the many references to His prayer life, not merely from the prayer in the Garden where he yielded to the Father's will when it was evidently contrary to what His humanity desired. One illustration that I like to ponder is the one we find in Luke 11:1.

He had been praying, about what we don't know, but as soon as He was finished, his disciples came to Him and asked, "Lord, teach us to pray."

What was behind that? I really believe that the request came out of a realization that He had something they didn't have. They saw that it was after seasons of prayer that He exhibited power, that He made decisions affecting their lives as well as His, and that He found wisdom for dealing with the difficult parts of His life.



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That is a request that you and I can make. Do you think it is in God's will for your life that you learn to pray? That you learn to pray as Jesus prayed? Ask Him. God promised that if we ask for anything within His will, and in the name of Jesus, we will have it. James says we have not because we ask not. And Jesus said *"Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full."*

What we can have, if we ask in that way, is the ability to perceive God's will. That is because we are praying in union with the Son, and in His Name. It is God's pleasure to show us His will, and then to enable us to do it in the everyday working of our lives.

Truth #2: The Major Decisions of His Life Were Made After Extended Seasons of Prayer

Look at Luke 6:12-16. This is just one of many illustrations of the extensiveness of the prayer life of Jesus. In this passage, He is in the process of selecting the twelve disciples whom He will designate Apostles -- those who will be close to Him and will minister with Him during His earthly ministry.

What we learn here, I believe, is that Jesus spent the night going over the names and faces and personalities of a great many of those disciples who were now following Him. How did He decide there should be twelve? Was that a counterpart in His life to the sons of Israel, fathers of the twelve tribes?

More importantly, how was He to know which of the many disciples would best serve Him and do the Father's will?

Henry Blackaby, among others, shares insight at this point. The reason Jesus spent all night in prayer, Dr. Blackaby believes, is that it took the Father that long to reveal to Him the twelve that the Father had already picked. Jesus needed to hear from the Father, and there was a long process of revelation and explanation.

This view from Dr. Blackaby and other modern disciples makes perfect sense. Is not this the way our prayer life should be, if we are to follow Christ as our model? When we have a major decision to make, we need to spend the time to hear from God. We need to be sure we have weighed all the evidence He may bring to our minds as we are in the process of asking His guidance. He may not do that quickly, and we must be patient and purposeful as we listen and as we allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God to us.

When you obligated yourself for a 30-year mortgage on your house, did you pray it through? Did you ask God to show you whether this is the house for you, and whether just the idea of buying a house is His will? What about the college you attended? Or the college your kids attend? How much prayer went into that decision? Were you willing to spend all night in prayer on a matter that would forever shape the life of your son or daughter -- or your own life? How about your business partnership, your career, your church membership, your acceptance of the committee chairmanship? Was that God speaking to you as you prayed and made the decision, or was it desire and political opportunism?

The key: Are we seriously praying about the most important things we do in this life, or leaving them to chance and to the siren song of the highest or lowest bidder?

You see, all of these things have to do with our relationship with our heavenly Father and with our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit living within us.

"He has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us," says Peter (2 Peter 1:3). This includes the right to ask Him for guidance -- and the right to expect an answer.