

**JEREMIAH 33:3 "CALL TO ME" GROUP BIBLE STUDIES – LEADER'S STUDY -
LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES**

LESSON #1 – A CHRISTIAN'S CALL TO PRAY – WHY BOTHER

A CHRISTIAN'S CALL – Every Christian knows that prayer is part of a believer's job description. Even though the Father invites Jesus' followers to call upon Him, even though we should eagerly desire to talk to Him, many followers of the Lord don't. Then, when they do call to the Lord, their prayers are often offered with questioning confidence, fearful faith, and doubtful determination. This lesson, *Why Bother*, takes an honest look at the reasons why people often ignore the opportunity of prayer.

THE PRAYER – Dear Lord, You have invited us to pray. Because of Jesus, You have promised to hear us. Now we ask that the Spirit would remove any barriers, which keep us from making use of this wonderful opportunity. In the Name of Jesus, our Intercessor, we pray it. Amen.

ILLUSTRATION - Now, having prayed that prayer, it's time to begin with a little test. The prayer wasn't a long one. Without re-reading the prayer, what was the one, simple thing the prayer asked for?

The prayer asked the Spirit to remove obstacles from our praying.

SATAN'S SUMMONS – It was a good many years ago that our six-year-old son came home from school with a giant, heart-shaped pillow. He proudly informed us that he had won this really big prize in his classroom's Valentine's Day party. After admiring the stuffed heart, I inquired what wonderful series of fortuitous events had produced something this beautiful. Kurt explained, "Well, the teacher put all our names together, and then picked one out - and she picked mine. Then he confessed, "Dad, I cheated. I won because I prayed!" Twenty years ago, I thought, "Isn't it wonderful that my son has such a great faith. Isn't it a shame he's going to grow up and find out differently."

THOUGHT: In truth, the great shame is that I, a lifelong Christian, had reduced God's promise to listen to prayer to the same level as the tooth fairy and the leprechaun's pot-o-gold at the end of the rainbow. Now I only confess this sin as boldly as I do because, as we share Jesus in the world, we have found a lot of people who have done the same thing. Take a look at these Scripture passages and answer the questions that accompany the text:

SCRIPTURE SEARCH 1 –

TEXT	QUESTION	ANSWER
Job 21:14-15	Why don't people want to pray?	They don't think it's profitable.
Psalms 14:4	Two marks of evildoers are:	Devouring God's people and not praying.
Psalms 79:6	What nations will experience God's anger?	Those that don't pray.
Jeremiah 10:21	What happens to the shepherds that don't pray?	Do not prosper.
Daniel 9:13	What should a God-fearing nation do?	Seek God's favor; turn from sins; pay attention to the truth.

FIRST APPLICATION: In the above passages, the participants came up with all kinds of reasons not to pray. Even today, many mature Christians develop, what is to them, some perfectly logical reasons not to get seriously involved with prayer. For example, if I were to say:

LET'S PRAY FOR

- A new car
- Good weather
- That we find \$5 dollars we lost.
- That terrorists be punished.
- That grandpa get healed from his illness.
- That I make a sale/get a raise/get good prices for grain

WHAT SOME (not all) MATURE CHRISTIANS MIGHT RESPOND

- We shouldn't pray for material things.
- We should leave such things to God.
- We shouldn't make God pay for our mistakes.
- God will repay. It's our job to forgive.
- God will do what is His will.
- God has bigger things to worry about.

Now, I know that there are times when it doesn't pay to pray. For example, it wasn't so many years ago that a man in Caribou County, British Columbia, was accused of having set a forest fire. Left alone in a room at the police station, he fell to his knees and prayed out loud, "Oh God, please let me get away with it." The difficulty was that his prayer was picked up on closed circuit television and was eventually admitted into evidence at the trial. That's an example of a man who shouldn't have prayed, or, if he was going to pray, he should at least have prayed silently.

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The truth is that many of us, especially men, feel uncomfortable praying. Can you list some reasons that might stop a person from praying publicly, or in a family setting:

1. Don't know how.
2. Father never did it when they were growing up.
3. Don't have the right words.
4. "Real men" don't pray.
5. God already knows what He is going to do so why should we bother to pray.

It's that last reason that bothers me. Too many Christians have the idea that whatever happens is the will of the all-powerful God. There can be no doubt that God is all powerful. That doesn't mean, however, that everything that happens is His will.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH 2 - CHRIST'S CALL - Looking at these passages, describe the event and answer, was this God's will?

TEXT	EVENT	WHOSE WILL WAS ANSWERED
Genesis 4: 8-12	Cain killed Abel	Cain's will, not God's.
2 Samuel 12:7-10	David committed adultery and murder.	David's lust, not God's will.
Matthew 2:16	Herod killed the baby boys of Bethlehem.	Herod's thirst for power. Not God's will.
Acts 5: 1-5	Ananias lied to the Lord and died.	Ananias' greed did this. It was not God's will
Acts 12: 21-23	Herod didn't give glory to God.	Herod wanted glory. He died in pain.

The truth is there are a great many sins. We know, as do you, that many of those sins, and a great deal of the evil that happens in this world, is rooted in our sinful nature. Not everything we see is the Lord's will. If that were true, the terror of the World Trade Center could be laid at the Lord's feet. Every rape, every murder, ever child beating would be God's fault. We proclaim that God wants the best for His people. That is why He urges us to pray. Look at these passages and see what is REALLY God's will.

PASSAGE	WHAT IS GOD'S ATTRIBUTE HERE?	WHAT SHOULD WE DO
2 Chronicles 5:13	Enduring love	To praise Him.
Psalms 34:8	The LORD is good;	We should take refuge in him.
Psalms 68:19	The Lord daily bears our burdens.	We should praise Him.
Psalms 107:8-9	He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry.	We should give Him thanks.
Psalms 119:68	God, and His actions are good.	We should learn His decrees.
Psalms 143:10	God leads us on level ground	We should learn His will.
Isaiah 63:7	God is kind, compassionate.	We will tell of His kindnesses.
Lamentations 3:25	The LORD is good	We should seek Him.
Nahum 1:7	The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble.	We should trust Him.

THOUGHT & ILLUSTRATION - Whenever Scripture talks about God's intentions toward sinful humanity, it describes Him as being good to us and wanting nothing but the best for us. Scripture is equally plain that God will not force good upon us. We need to call upon Him in prayer and trust His decision. It's sort of like when you go to the doctor. He writes out a little prescription that you can't read. You take it to the pharmacist and he disappears behind a screen to fill it. When he returns, he gives you a bottle and says, "Take it three times a day." By faith you follow his directions (usually). You trust the doctor to do what is right. We are proud to share that is our relationship with God. We come to Him. We listen to Him. We do what He says and believe He is right. Let's close with prayer.

THE WAY OF PRAYER – Dear Lord, we come to You because You have told us to. That is reason enough. We also come because You have, over the years, proven You have nothing but the best of intentions toward us. We may not always understand Your will. We may not always agree with the way things work out. But having seen Jesus on the cross, we know Your ways are best. In His Name. Amen.