

LESSON PLAN

ACCEPTABLE PRAYER

Matthew 6 & John 14-16

Lesson Memory Verse: John 14:14 - "If you shall ask anything in My name, I will do it."

Lesson Aim: To teach children how to pray properly and to urge them to pray acceptable prayers in their daily lives.

Lesson Plan: Use the KEY – HE – SEE – WE – BE plan (explained in the Introductory Notes).

KEY (for Attention): Hudson Taylor was a man who gave his life to God and became a missionary to China. He crossed the ocean in a sailing ship. Sailing ships move as wind blows into the huge sails. One day the captain of the ship came up to Hudson Taylor. "Sir," he said, "I know you trust in God. I want to ask you a favor. The wind has completely stopped and we are getting nowhere on our trip. Will you please pray that God will send us wind?" "Yes, of course," replied Hudson Taylor, "if you will go first and set the sails."

The captain looked surprised. "But sire," he said, "People will laugh at me if I set the sails when there is no wind!" "Well," smiled Mr. Taylor, "I will only pray if you will set the sails in preparation for God's answer."

Finally the captain agreed. As soon as the sails were set Hudson Taylor went down to his stateroom and began to pray earnestly for wind. Soon there was a knock at the door. It was the captain who said, "Mr. Taylor, are you still praying for the wind?" "Why, yes," answered Hudson Taylor.

"Then please stop! We have more wind now than we need!" The ship sped on its way to China.

Prayer is an exciting adventure, and today I want to teach you how to pray. First, we will learn how to pray by understanding our memory verse.

HE (for Authority): Invite the children's attention to John 14:13. Read it to them and ask them what it means. After listening to their ideas, explain that this is a promise of God but that it does not mean that we can ask for anything and be sure of receiving it from God. (We cannot ask for a million dollars just because we would like to be rich and have lots of new toys and clothes, etc. That would be a selfish request and so it would not be good for us to have all that money. God will not say "yes" to that kind of prayer.) If we want to claim God's promise, we must follow the rules He has given us in this verse on how to pray. He says we can ask for anything in Jesus' name and receive it that the Father may be glorified. But if our prayer is selfish and is for our pleasure, then it will not glorify God. That kind of prayer will not be answered. We are not to use prayer as a way to make God serve our sinful desires. We are to use prayer as a way to glorify God.

SEE (for Apperception) and WE (for Application): PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word. Let's look at some of the rules for acceptable prayer. (It would be wise to place these rules on a card or on the whiteboard before teaching.)

OUTLINE OF THE DOCTRINE: Jesus' Rules for Acceptable Prayer

Many rules for acceptable prayer are in the model prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples –**Mt 6:9-13**.

1. Be in God's family – "Our Father" indicates the person who prays should know Him as Father. This means he has received Jesus as his Savior (Jn 1:12). God will answer the prayers of His children, but He has not promised to answer the prayers of those that have refused to receive His Son as their Savior.

2. Worship God – "Hallowed be Your name." The name of God is holy and it refers to His holiness. In respect of His holiness, people and angels often fall down to worship Him. It is wise to come into His presence with worship for Him and then make your requests.

3. Seek His Kingdom first – "Your Kingdom come." Jesus told His disciples to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness before asking for food, drink and clothing. If they put God's Kingdom first, these other things would be added to them (Mt 6:33). It is important that God's Kingdom come to the earth. That is when His Son will rule all the nations for 1000 years and the earth will bring glory to God as it did when He first created it (Isa 65:21-25; Zech 14:9; Rev 20:4, 6).

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4. Want God's will to be done – “Your will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.” His will is revealed in the Bible. Read the Bible to know a great bit about His will. Asking for sinful things will not be answered. Asking for a thing like winning a ball game or winning a prize is selfish and will not be answered (Jam 4:3). Asking for health is often given because He is merciful, but sometimes it is not given for reasons known only to Him. Asking for courage to witness pleases God and it will be answered if he will use his courage to witness. Asking God to convict specific lost sinners will be answered, but asking Him to save those sinners is another matter. He wants to save all people (1 Tim 2:1-4), but He has left the decision to be saved up to them (Mt 10:32-33; Jn 3:14-18). Asking for material things is okay, but the answer must be left up to God; He knows what is best for each person. Asking for spiritual blessings will be granted according to a person's diligence to use them to serve Him. These are some areas to consider in praying for God's will to be done.

5. Depend on God for daily food – “Give us this day our daily bread.” God will give His children food for each day of their lives, if they ask for it (Ps 37:25). Ask and receive it joyfully. Do not complain about the food like the Israelites grumbled about the manna. Eat the food with thanks.

6. Ask for forgiveness – “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Be humble and confess wrongdoing. Forgive others. God looks for these things before He answers a prayer for forgiveness.

7. Victory over temptation – “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” God is pleased to answer the prayer of a believer to be delivered from evil or from the evil one (Satan). He promises that He will not allow a believer to be tempted above what he can handle with His help (1 Cor 10:13).

WE: We found seven rules from Jesus' model prayer to make our prayers acceptable. Remember them.

In addition to these rules, Jesus gave a couple more rules to His disciples for acceptable prayers.

8 and 9. Love Jesus and keep His commands - John 14:14-15; 15:7. Compare John 15:7 with John 14:15 and it will be seen that they are the same rules for receiving whatever is asked of Him in prayer. “Abide in Me” is to “love Me” and “My words abide in you” is “keep My commandments.” What are His commands? A person is to believe Jesus is God's Son. When he does, he shows love to God. And then he is to love everyone (1 Jn 3:22-24). This is what Jesus told the lawyer that asked about the greatest commandment. He told him to love God (Dt 6:5) and the second greatest was to love his neighbor as himself (Lev 19:18). If these two commandments are kept, that person's prayers will be acceptable to God and they will be answered.

WE: When we love Jesus and keep His commands, we will ask for the things that please Him and He will answer our prayers. .

10. Pray in Jesus' name - Jn 15:16; 16:24. Jesus gave His disciples a big task of spreading the good news of salvation to many parts of the world, so He promised that they could ask in His name for anything that they needed to do His work and He would answer their prayers. What did it mean to ask in His name? It would be like receiving a credit card from your favorite uncle to do a job for him. He said that you could use the credit card to spend whatever you needed to do this job for him. When you used the card to pay the bills, it would bring joy to your heart. It would be like that for the disciples as they prayed to Jesus for help in preaching the good news of His gift of salvation.

WE: We must remember to pray in Jesus' name to supply our needs in doing His work. Be sure to claim His promise.

APPLICATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE

Here is the story of a man who obeyed the rules for prayer that Jesus gave His disciples and he had his prayers answered in a mighty way.

GEORGE MUELLER; MAN OF PRAYER

George Mueller sat gazing across the valleys at the Swiss Alps rising all about him. It was a warm sunny afternoon and George yawned. Finally his four friends were asleep. Now he would take care of his business. Then he, too, could catch a nap. Looking around to be sure that the other young men were all really asleep, George quietly slipped his hand into a large leather pouch. He was glad his friends had chosen him to take care of the money for their long summer vacation trip across the mountains. He knew how to take care of money all right. Noiselessly he reached into one after another of the five little pouches inside the big bag. He slipped a few of the coins from each of the first four into the fifth little

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pouch (his own, of course). Then he put the leather pouch away and lay down on the grass smiling to himself. Though he was only 20 years old, George Mueller was very good at stealing and what is more, he didn't even feel guilty about it – at least not too guilty. "It doesn't matter that I am studying to be a minister," he thought. "I'm not any worse than any of the other guys."

But George, for all of his traveling and for all the money he stole and all the worldly friends he had, was not happy. When the summer was over and George was back at the university, he began to think about reforming. He felt very empty inside. He knew that he was sinful. God seemed very unreal and far away to him. How could he tell other people about God when he felt so empty inside?

That fall, George began to notice a change in one of his friends, Beta. One night Beta said he was going to go to a prayer meeting. George laughed and teased Beta, "You're going to a prayer meeting?" But he really wanted to go along. And he did.

That night at Mr. Wagner's prayer meeting, George saw men do something he had never seen before. He saw them one by one get down on their knees in public! One by one, he heard them pray. When they prayed they weren't just saying fancy words, either. They were talking to God. George knew they were and in his heart he knew God was listening to them and would answer. He was deeply impressed. How brave those men were. They were not ashamed to humble themselves before God!

As George walked back to his room at the university, he was deep in thought. When he got home, he went over to his bed and for the first time in his life at 21 years of age he kneeled beside it and cried out to God. That night George Mueller accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and his life began to change. **(First rule)**

WE: We all must pray, "Lord Jesus, forgive me for my awful sin and save me!" That is the first prayer that the Lord promises to hear. Then we can pray other prayers if we follow His rules.

Before he was saved, George had felt bitter toward his father and had refused to show him respect. Now he began to love his father and to realize that his father was sometimes unfair because he was not a Christian himself. Inside he forgave his father and began to see that he too had been unfair, that he had caused his father a lot of sorrow by his lying and stealing. **(Sixth rule)**

WE: Do we forgive others who have been unfair to us?

George began to talk to God and to read his Bible. He was happy inside for the first time in his life. But he also felt very sorry because he began to feel guilty about his sins. George saw how God felt about his drinking, his gambling, his cheating, and his evil thoughts. One by one he confessed his sins and turned from them. **(Sixth rule)**

WE: Are we like George, or are we hanging on to some wicked sins?

George began working harder than ever on his studies and spending all of his extra time with other Christians. He could hardly believe that God had loved him so much that He had sent Jesus to die for him. He knew that God could accept his prayers only because of what Jesus had done for him and he thanked God over and over for saving such a sinner as he. (In fact, George Mueller never stopped praising and thanking God through his whole life!) George always prayed asking for things in Jesus' name. He knew that he could not come in his own name because by himself, without Jesus Christ, he was not acceptable to God. **(Ninth rule)**

WE: Do we pray in Jesus' name and trust Him to take our prayers to God? Are our prayers pleasing to Jesus?

One day, George met a man named Hermann Ball. Hermann had grown up in a very rich family, but when he accepted the Lord and gave his life to serve as a missionary, his family disowned him. Hermann's eyes shone as he told George how God was working among the poor Jewish people in Poland. God began to touch George's heart. You see, George had been praying that God would let him marry a very pretty girl named Ermegarde. Ermegarde came to the meetings of the Christians, but she did not want to give the Lord her life. She wanted to have a big house, lots of pretty clothes and expensive things.

For a while, George was miserable inside. He knew that God wanted him to serve as a missionary somehow, but he wanted to marry Ermegarde. George began to feel that God was not listening to his prayers anymore. He was very unhappy. He was unhappy because he was being selfish. Finally, he

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could stand it no longer. He gave up Ermegarde and decided to do God's will. He knew he could only be happy doing what God wanted him to do. **(Fourth rule)**

One weekend when George was visiting his unsaved father, he told his father some special news. "Father," George said respectfully. "I believe with all my heart that God wants me to be a missionary."

George's father became very angry. "I am paying your way through school," he shouted, "and I want you to stay in Germany, our homeland. Someday you will be a 'nice' minister. You will have a good salary and a big house. You will make your old father proud and happy. Let's hear no more of this missionary talk!" George felt sad. "Father," George's voice was soft but serious. "I love you very much, but I must obey God. I will not accept any more money from you, for I cannot obey your wishes in payment." The Lord helped him win the victory over the temptation to disobey God's call. **(Seventh rule)**

From then on George had to depend completely on God. When he got back to the university, he prayed and asked God to supply his needs. Later that same evening, there was a knock at the door. It was one of George's professors, Dr. Tholloch, a very godly Christian man. Another man was with him, an American professor. The American professor and three of his friends needed to learn German so that they could teach. Since George knew both English and German, they wanted him to teach them. They were willing to pay him. When George figured up what he would earn, he was amazed. It would be just enough to cover his expenses! God, he knew, had answered his prayer! George bowed his head, "Thank you, dear heavenly Father, for supplying my needs!" he exclaimed. He put God's Kingdom and His righteousness first and God took care of his needs. **(Third rule)**

WE: We need to put God's Kingdom first and trust Him to take care of our needs. We must learn to claim this promise of God, if we want a life full of His blessings.

God used George Mueller greatly. When he had finished his studies, he went to England as a missionary. There he pastored churches and after much prayer and careful planning, God used George to start homes for children that did not have parents. In the homes the children were taught to read and write and to work. They were taught, too, that Jesus loved them and had died for them. Through this work with orphan children, George was able to win many, many people to the Lord.

George never asked men for money or for anything else he needed. He always went right to God. More and more George learned to trust God completely. Sometimes God provided money and food only a day at a time, but George never feared even though he was responsible for feeding many, many children. **(Fifth rule)** He knew God would not fail him if he stayed close to God and trusted and prayed. One time when all the money was gone and George did not know what to do to pay bills, a lady came and said that God had told her to sell some of her expensive jewelry and give the money to Mr. Mueller. George thanked God for supplying just exactly the amount he needed! **(Second rule)**

George read and studied his Bible much. He read his Bible through 155 times in his life. That was between 2 and 3 times a year for over seventy years. George was a busy man, but he knew that he had to stay close to God. George knew how to pray. He knew God's rules for prayer because he spent time reading God's Word letting God talk to him. He loved Jesus and tried to keep His commandments. That is why God answered George Mueller's prayers in miraculous ways. **(Eighth rule)**

For many years George prayed for the son of a wealthy man who gave much money to be used for the orphanages. It seemed that the son would never accept Jesus as Savior. Finally, the wealthy man died and went to be with the Lord. When his son was going over his father's books he saw that he had given much money to Mr. Mueller. He decided to pay George a visit and give him some money himself. While he was at the orphan home, he heard a Bible message being preached to the children. God convicted him of his sins and the man began to cry. He asked God to save him from his sins. The workers at the orphan home were not surprised, though, because they knew that for 38 years Mr. Mueller had been praying regularly for the wealthy man's son! Isn't God wonderful?

WE: We will have answers to our prayers just as George Mueller had answers to his prayers if we trust Him and obey Jesus' rules for prayer.

BE (for Action): George Mueller died when he was 93 years old, but his testimony still lives. Like George Mueller, we can have our prayers answered and see God do mighty things with our lives if we will yield ourselves to Him and obey Jesus' rules. (Have the children review them.) Which of these nine rules will you try to put into practice this week? (Let them suggest the rule that they are going to work on.) If you really mean it, will you tell God now and ask Him to help you? He will hear your prayer.