

# Learning from the Master

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by Jim Johns

## Part 1

**In the life of prayer, our primary example is in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The heavenly Father's purpose for every Christian is that we be conformed to the likeness of His Son (Romans 8:29). The most characteristic element of the life of Jesus is His prayer life. If we are to be like Him, we must begin with an understanding of what His prayer life was like -- what it meant and the part that it played in His earthly pilgrimage.

This article is the first in a series to encourage us to learn from Him the true meaning of a life of prayer, and thus to have that same communion with the Father that was the source of direction and of power in the Master's earthly life.

"I just don't understand what God is doing in my life. Things aren't going the way they ought to go."

You may have heard Christian friends making such a statement. Struggling to cope with seemingly unexplainable events in your life, you may have said it yourself. As I travel and engage in prayer and discipleship conferences across the country, I hear those words with increasing frequency. I always respond, with great confidence, that I know exactly what God is doing: "He is conforming you to the likeness of His Son." In Romans 8:29, Paul writes, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

I don't presume to explain the precise meaning of each step He is taking, but I can tell you without hesitation that, if you are a child of God, what He is doing in your life right now is a part of His determination to conform you to the likeness -- or image -- of His Son.

The important thing for us to do is to gain, through the Scriptures, an understanding of what it really means to be in the likeness of Jesus Christ. And for our purposes here, we need to put that in the context of prayer.

What would it be like for my prayer life to be like His prayer life?

What characterized His prayer life?

Certainly the most dramatic and illustrative passage of scripture describing Jesus' life of prayer is found in the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 5:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:7-10 NIV)

Here we have a concise presentation of the Master's prayer life. The first important thing we see is that this is what His prayer life was like during His life on earth (in Hebrews 7:25, we find that He is still praying in heaven, praying for us as intercessor. The life of Jesus always was and still is a life of prayer.)

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## **On earth, Jesus' prayer life contained:**

### **1. Passion and Compassion**

He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears. Is it any wonder that we have so few true intercessors in our time? How long has it been since your communion with the heavenly Father led you to loud cries and tears? But I can tell you that in our day God is raising up men and women whose hearts can be broken over a lost world and a lost neighbor and a brother or sister drifting into sin and rebellion. We're seeing that more and more wherever we go. God is doing a work in His people to conform us to the likeness of His son in passion and compassion.

### **2. Reverent Submission**

Do our prayers reveal a reverent submission to the will of the Father? The prayers of Jesus always did. The writer of Hebrews here reminds us of Jesus' prayer in the Garden, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me..." Was His prayer heard? Yes. But the answer was "no." The will of the Father was that He endure the cross, despising the shame, and thus become the firstborn among many brothers. And when Jesus heard the will of His Father, He yielded in reverent submission.

Is it in your heart to yield to the will of the Father in reverent submission? When the evident leading of God takes you in a direction that you don't wish to go, and the end of which is hidden from you, are you able to respond in reverent submission?

That is a characteristic of the prayer life of Jesus, and it must become a characteristic of ours, if we are to be conformed to His likeness.

### **3. Obedience**

He learned obedience by what He suffered. And that is the way you and I will learn obedience. Not one of us will ask God to give us suffering, but I can tell you that suffering will come. Without a doubt, it has already come into your life, and will come again. That is why you're seeking to learn more about prayer, and about your personal relationship with the heavenly Father. Because God is molding your life just as He molded the life of His Son -- through the purifying fire of suffering.

### **4. Victory**

Once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. That was the culmination of God's will for the Lord Jesus. Everything that came before was preparation. And everything in your life and mine so far has been preparation, as God has been crafting us into the vessels of His choosing.

Can we be made perfect? Yes. Perfect here means complete. Jesus, on the last night of His life, prayed, "Father, I have finished the work you gave me to do." That is what spiritual perfection is: completing the work God created us to do. Paul wrote to Timothy, "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day -- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing." Would we have looked at Paul and called him "perfect"? No. This is the same Paul who in Romans 7 says plainly that he doesn't do what he knows he should, and does the things he knows he shouldn't. But what he did was finish what God gave him to do.

The writer of Hebrews is giving us the example of Jesus in that same light. It was in His obedience to the Father, in accomplishing the will of the Father, that He became the source of our eternal salvation.

### **Look inward**

Examine your own prayer life. How does it measure up to that of our Lord in passion and compassion? In reverent submission? In obedience? In victory? Yield your prayer life to the transforming power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and allow the Father to do in you all He desires to do.

If the Father is to conform us to the likeness of His Son, the first steps will be seen in our conformity to His life of prayer.