



Essential Lessons for Christian Leaders



Prayer:

Essential Lessons for Christian Leaders

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## **Introduction**

As the disciples watched Jesus pray, they saw intimate communication with God. Who wouldn't want to speak with God as Jesus did? So the disciples urgently asked Jesus to teach them to pray. There is no record of them asking Jesus to teach them to preach, teach, or evangelize. But they wanted to learn to speak with God as Jesus did. In response to their request, Jesus gave them a model prayer, "Our Father." We need to learn how to pray, and who better to teach us than Jesus? As we consider the model prayer, we will discover how our lives can be transformed by intimate communication with God. We will explore the following elements of the model prayer:

### **Participation:**

"In this manner, therefore, pray:"

### **Person:**

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name."

### **Purpose:**

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

### **Petition:**

"Give us this day our daily bread."

### **Preparation:**

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

### **Protection:**

"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

### **Power:**

"For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

The disciples were devout men versed in the prayers of the Hebrews, but their experience with Jesus impressed upon them a desire to go deeper in their communication with God. Have you ever wanted to go deeper? The goal of this study is to encourage you to enhance your relationship with God through prayer and find fulfillment, satisfaction, and transformation.

When I was in college, I had a friend who had a salt-water aquarium. I loved to watch the tropical fish with their vibrant colors. I thought it would be so cool to be the little "diver-guy" who was there at the bottom of the tank watching all the fish swim past him. Then, one year I went to Hawaii and snorkeled every day at the coral reefs with the tropical fish. I thought it was the best experience possible. But then, I spoke with a man who had just gone scuba diving for the first time and he was blessed to see a whale on his first dive. I tried to imagine how awesome it would be to go deeper and see new discoveries. I assumed it couldn't get any

better than scuba diving. But then, I went in a submarine to an even greater depth and saw sharks and sea life that I had never seen before.

Prayer is the means to an intimate relationship with God. This study is intended to be a launching point rather than the destination. Like a scuba lesson, it is intended to help prepare you for the great discoveries you will make, but it is not itself the goal. Failing to pray to the True and Living God is just as futile as praying fervently to a false god. Nearly everyone prays to some degree to some perceived god. Yet relatively few find fulfillment, satisfaction, and transformation. The problem is that we often approach prayer as a means to get something good or avoid a bad consequence rather than to develop an intimate relationship with God.

Relationships require time. Intimate relationships are fashioned through time together. If we want healthy relationships with our spouse, our kids, our friends, or our God, we need to spend time with them. The obstacle is that no one seems to have enough time. Our priorities are reflected by our allocation of this precious resource...time. We generally believe that we don't have time to pray. We must take time away from other valuable areas and devote that time to develop a life-transforming, intimate relationship with God through prayer.

As I write this book I repeatedly look at an icon on my computer desktop that says "Shortcut to fruitful prayer." The irony is that there is no shortcut to fruitful prayer. Rather, we learn how to pray, and then we live what we have learned. The result is life-transforming, intimate communication with God.

Oswald Chambers observed, "Prayer is the vital breath of Christians. Not the thing that makes us alive, but the evidence we are alive." What would happen if no one prayed? Would the world be different? Would events and circumstances be changed? Would the hearts of people be impacted? Our responses to these inquiries may reflect our attitude about the effectiveness of prayer.

In Judaism and Christianity, prayer is rooted in a biblical understanding of God as a personal being who hears and responds to His people. The earliest prayers in the Bible are intimate dialogues: Adam speaking with God in the Garden of Eden; the elderly patriarch Abraham, expressing his bewilderment over God's promise that he would be a father of a great nation; and Moses, responding in awe ("Here I am!") to the voice of God in the burning bush and then obeying God's call to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. In the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as the teacher and exemplar of prayer. While He observed the traditional custom of praying at the Temple and at the synagogue, He prays with distinct passion and intimacy. It is Jesus who embodies intimate communication with God, and truly teaches us to pray.

Finally, Jesus made the connection between bearing fruit and prayer: *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you"* [John 15:16]. First, fruit refers to Christ-like character and conduct. Jesus urges His disciples to realize that there is a connection between prayer and bearing fruit. Lives are transformed by intimate



communication with God... fruitful prayer. Second, Jesus also assures us that God desires to respond to our prayers and is waiting for us to ask. Ultimately, Jesus is assuring us that He has chosen us and will enable us to be people of prayer.

***A Pattern for Prayer***

“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” [Matthew 6:9-13].

## **Section One: Participation**

"In this manner, therefore, pray."

In this section we will consider the fundamental question of why we should participate in prayer. We will consider the following specific themes:

**the invitation to pray**  
**the example of Jesus**  
**the example of the early church**  
**the benefits of prayer**  
**the obstacles to prayer**  
**tips for prayer**

## Chapter 1: The Invitation to Pray

As we consider the subject of participation, we want to address the issue of why we should pray. Jesus begins the model prayer by instructing us, *"In this manner, therefore, pray..."* He presumes that we will pray because we have been invited by God to pray. Three times in the preceding four verses Jesus declares, *"When you pray"* [Matthew 6:5, 6, 7]. In the original Greek texts it is clear that He uses the term "you" in the singular as well as the plural. Accordingly, Jesus addresses the need for individual and group prayer. Jesus did not say "if" but "when" you pray. He is addressing believers, and He assumes that they will pray. In other words, prayer is a normative Christian attitude and behavior.

Jesus emphasized that prayer was all about intimate communication with God. He makes this point by contrasting the prayers of the religious leaders and His model for prayer: *"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"* [Matthew 6:5-6].

First, Jesus reminds us not to pray for the attention or approval of people but rather for God's attention and approval. The religious leaders of Jesus' day would gather groups to hear them pray. They would delight to hear the praise and approval of those who heard them pray. Their motive for praying was to impress people and receive recognition from people. Certainly, each of us has to be careful to avoid this glaring error in our prayer life. But there are also more subtle forms of this problem. For example, when a pastor concludes a sermon at church and prays a closing prayer... rather than speak to God, he summarizes the sermon points to reinforce the message for the church. Or imagine a group of people who are praying together. Rather than simply praying to God, "Heal my uncle Joe," we might want to alert everyone in the group about the context of the prayer. So we might pray something like this, "Lord, You know my uncle, Joe, and how he hurt his ankle playing softball. The doctors weren't sure how bad it was, but they wouldn't refer him for an MRI because of his insurance. And you know how the nurse said that he might not be able to walk for four weeks. And I just pray that You would heal him." We want to be careful that we are focused on speaking to God.

Second, Jesus makes clear that prayers directed to God shall be rewarded by God. Jesus said that those who pray to be seen by men receive a reward. Their reward is the approval of other people. He used the Greek term *misthos* [v.5], which refers to wages or payment for service and implies something physical or secular. Jesus also promised a reward for those who pray to communicate with God. In verse six, Jesus used the Greek term *apodidomi*, which is also translated, "reward". This term for God's reward means to give away, restore, to deliver again, and fulfill one's duty to someone. God's reward implies a spiritual dimension. Jesus sought to distinguish the reward from God and the reward from men.

What is the reward? We know that if we pray according to God's will, we shall receive our requests. The fact that God responds to prayer when He might not otherwise respond is certainly a reward. But the reward that Jesus is speaking of is more significant. The reward that Jesus is promising is a life transformed by intimate communication with God. He distinguishes the prayers of the religious leaders because their prayers were not intimate communication with God and did not result in transformed lives.

Jesus explained to the disciples, and to us, that the Father knows the things we have need of before we ask [v.8]. So why do we need to ask? First, by asking, we are reminded that He is the source of blessing. Second, we tell Him what He already knows in order that we may get to know it as He does. Third, our asking acknowledges the Father as God and affirms our dependence upon Him. Fourth, God probably delights to hear us ask in the same way that we as earthly parents want to hear our children come to us with their requests even when we already know them. Finally, we pray because God is inviting us to have intimate communication with Him.

We cannot tell God anything He doesn't already know. When we pray, we simply put into words what He's been aware of all along. That doesn't make prayer unnecessary; rather, it encourages us to pray. We find relief in talking to someone who knows us and our situation fully. It's a comfort to know that God's response arises not from information that we give Him but from His perfect knowledge of our circumstances. He knows all conditions—past, present, future—that bear on our well being. God knows the end from the beginning, so we can trust Him with everything between.

In the Tabernacle and the Temple there was an area called the Holy of Holies, where God would meet His people. The Holy of Holies was separated from the congregation by a thick veil. The veil represented the division between a perfect God and less-than-perfect men. This separation was so great that only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and then on just one day per year: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom [Matthew 27:51]. It is significant that the veil was torn from top to bottom. If the veil had been torn from the bottom up, it would have appeared to be from man's efforts to gain access to God. But since the veil was torn from the top to the bottom, it demonstrated God's invitation to come to Him.

In ancient days, people were afraid to approach a monarch. In the books of Esther and Nehemiah, we learn that even the queen and the king's trusted cupbearer were afraid to approach the Persian King. Yet we have been invited so we can approach the throne of the King of Kings with confidence: *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* [Hebrews 4:16]. One of the great mysteries of heaven is that men have been invited by God to pray and we neglect the invitation.

C.H. Spurgeon observed, "Most Christians are only up to their ankles in the river of experience. Some have waded so the stream is up to their knees. A few found water up to their shoulders. But few find it a river to swim in—the bottom of which they cannot touch."

All believers know Jesus, but to know Him intimately...to feel the breath of the Master upon the neck, to feel His touch, the calloused hand of the Carpenter, pierced by nails, hugging me...to be close enough to Him to feel His heartbeat... to be close enough to Him to experience the Lamb of God handing me the Bread of Life and the Cup of the New Covenant is a different and life transforming experience. I yearn to be close enough to Him to reflect His virtue. This is the purpose of the study—lives transformed by intimate communication with God. William Carey, the great missionary remarked, “Prayer-secret, fervent, believing prayer-lies at the root of all personal godliness.”

Robert Boyd Munger wrote an inspiring book, *My Heart-Christ's Home*, describing the Christian life. He paints a picture of Jesus entering our lives like a newly-arrived guest going from room to room in our homes. The library represents our minds. There, Jesus finds all sorts of worthless reading material and entertainment, which He proceeds to throw out and replace with His Word. In the dining room, which speaks of the bodily appetites, He finds many sinful desires listed on a worldly menu. In the place of such things as prestige, materialism, and lust, He puts humility, meekness, love, and all other virtues for which believers are to hunger and thirst. The quietest room in the house is the living room, where Jesus has invited the Christian to come every day to spend time with Him. After a while, the Christian allows time with Christ to be crowded out until simple fellowship with Him is virtually absent from his life.

Munger describes the experience as follows: “Under the pressure of many responsibilities, little by little, this time began to be shortened. Why, I’m not sure. Somehow I assumed I was just too busy to give special, regular time to be with Christ. This was not a deliberate decision, you understand; it just seemed to happen that way.

“Eventually, not only was the period of time shortened, but I began to miss days now and then, such as during mid-terms or finals. Matters of urgency demanding my attention were continually crowding out the quiet times of conversation with Jesus. Often I would miss it two days in a row or more.

“One day I recall rushing down the steps in a hurry to be on my way to an important appointment. As I passed the living room, the door was wide open. Glancing in I saw a fire in the fireplace and Jesus sitting there. Suddenly, in dismay, it came to me, ‘He is my guest. I invited him into my heart! He has come as my Savior and friend to live with me. Yet here I am neglecting him.’ I stopped, turned and hesitantly went in. With downcast glance I said, ‘Master, I’m sorry. Have you been here every morning?’ ‘Yes’ he said. ‘I told you I would be here to meet with you.

“I was even more ashamed! He had been faithful in spite of my faithlessness. I asked him to forgive me and he did, as he always does when we acknowledge our failures and want to do the right thing.

“He said, ‘The trouble is that you have been thinking of the quiet time, of Bible study and prayer, as a means of your own spiritual growth. This is true but you have forgotten that this

hour means something to me also. Remember, I love you. At a great cost I have redeemed you. I value your fellowship. Just to have you look into my face warms my heart. Don't neglect this hour if only for my sake. Whether or not you want to be with me, remember I want to be with you. I really love you!"

Prayer is like sitting down to a meal with God and getting to know Him. The purpose is to cultivate a relationship rather than fulfill a function or perform a task. We should approach prayer as a time where we will respond to God's invitation to develop a relationship with Him rather than a function to get something from him. Andrew Murray described the problem as follows, "The great lack of our faith is that we do not know God." The solution is to learn to pray and experience prayer. E.M. Bounds described the importance of prayer when he observed: "Talking to men for God is a great thing, but talking to God for men is greater still." We should be encouraged to pray because God has invited us to pray.

## Chapter 2: The Examples of Jesus and the Early Church

### *The example of Jesus*

#### **Luke 11:1**

*“Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, at one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’”*

An anonymous disciple approached Jesus seeking to learn how to pray as Jesus prayed. It is interesting that only one of the disciples made the request. This unnamed disciple could have been a spokesman for the group because we observe that he said, *“teach us.”* Or he could have simply approached Jesus on his own initiative, realizing that learning to pray as Jesus prayed would be of great benefit to all the disciples. Nineteen times in the Gospel accounts we are told that Jesus prayed. Near the end of Luke’s account, we are told that Jesus went to pray at the Mount of Olives *as He was accustomed*. Jesus’ life was characterized by prayer. Surely we all need to learn to pray more effectively; who better to learn from than Jesus? Nevertheless, it appears true that there are relatively few who are stirred to learn to pray as Jesus prayed in order to cultivate intimacy with God.

The religious leaders were men who prayed in public three or more times a day. Their prayers were well known to the disciples. But something about Jesus’ prayers was different from the religious leaders’. We could draw endless distinctions between Jesus’ prayers and the religious leaders’, but it is likely sufficient to focus on two concepts: **intimacy and intensity**.

The intimacy of Jesus’ prayers could be described as the contrast between relationship and religion or ritual. Jesus’ prayers were fresh in the sense that He did not merely repeat rote prayers as did the religious leaders. Similarly, He instructed us to avoid vain repetitions when we pray [Matthew 6:7]. Jesus noted that vain repetitions, or mere rote prayers, were characteristic of those who had no true relationship with God. For example, many of us have heard someone pray to God by repeating the words of the model prayer, “Our Father...” Each time they pray, they simply repeat the words without any other communication with God. You can easily imagine how awkward it would be to converse with a friend or family member if our communication was limited to repeating the same sentences. Jesus approached God as someone who knew the Father intimately. Prayer is the very essence of spirituality where we learn to speak with God as a man speaks with his friend.

The intensity of the Lord’s prayers is seen throughout His ministry. During the final week of the Lord’s earthly ministry, He entered Jerusalem and came to the Temple. He cleansed the Temple and drove out those who extorted worshipers in connection with the animal sacrifices and the exchange rate regarding the temple tax. He overturned tables and chairs and declared, *“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves’”* [Matthew 21:13]. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 56:7 to assert His authority to cleanse the Temple

and to affirm that His people are called to be a house of prayer. Jesus' zeal for prayer was seen in the passionate intensity in which He reminded us of the purpose of the Church... we are to be a house of prayer.

The intensity is also seen in the Garden of Gethsemane as described by Luke, *"And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* [Luke 22:44]. The Greek term that we translate "agony" means anguish or to struggle; the term we translate "earnestly" means to extend, put forth, stretch forth without ceasing, and fervently. Jesus performed miracles without any difficulty, but He agonized in prayer.

Jesus often withdrew to pray, sometimes spending long hours into the night on His knees [Matthew 14:23; 26:36; Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12]. Henri Nouwen describes the prayer of Jesus as recorded in Mark 1:35 as follows: "In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. In the middle of sentences loaded with action-healing suffering people, casting out of devils, responding to impatient disciples, traveling from town to town and preaching from synagogue to synagogue, we find these quiet words. In the center of breathless activities, we hear a restful breathing. Surrounded by hours of moving we find a moment of quiet stillness. In the heart of much involvement there are words of withdrawal. In the midst of action there is contemplation. And after much togetherness there is solitude. The more I read this nearly silent sentence locked in between the loud words of action, the more I have a sense that the secret of Jesus' ministry is hidden in that lonely place where he went to pray, early in the morning, long before dawn."

In the lonely place, Jesus finds the courage to follow God's will and not His own, to speak God's words and not His own, to do God's work and not His own. He reminds us constantly: *"I can do nothing by myself...my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of Him who sent me"* [John 5:30]. It is in the lonely place, where Jesus enters into intimacy with the Father, that His ministry is born.

The words "pray" and "prayer" are used more than twenty-five times as recorded in Jesus' brief ministry described in the gospels. Prayer is certainly important in His earthly ministry. His life demonstrates the importance of prayer by His example of intimacy and intensity. But prayer seems to be an even more important part of Jesus' present ministry. *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them"* [Hebrews 7:25]. Jesus is in heaven interceding for His Church 24/7. If we ask God to help us to pray, Jesus will intercede to help us pray. He exists to help us to participate in an intimate relationship with God.

### ***The example of the early church***

The early church as described in the Book of Acts is a picture of God's blueprint for the Church. It is a powerful church with a solid foundation built upon an intimate relationship with Christ. This relationship was born through time in His Word and prayer. despite all the technological



advances that we have been able to develop: the television, the radio, the Internet, the printing press, and multi-media presentation, we still lack the spiritual influence of the early church. The early church was comprised of people just like us. They were flawed and weak, but they wanted a relationship with God. They learned from Jesus the importance of prayer, and they chose to participate in prayer.

E.M. Bounds, in his classic devotion on prayer, "Power Through Prayer," observes, "We are constantly straining to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Gospel. What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Spirit can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer."

Acts is a study in fruitful prayer. The book begins with a picture of the Church praying in the upper room, waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Spirit came upon them, and their prayer was empowered by God. The church continued steadfastly in prayer. They were seeking to have intimate communion with God through the study of His Word, remembering Him through the Lord's Supper, and fellowship with one another to encourage a deeper life with God. God's ideal is simply described: "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer*" [Acts 2:42]. As they sought God, He was found in a profound way. People's lives were being transformed. People were discovering God's love for them, and they were responding with love for God and love for one another. God was growing His Church in so many ways, and the sphere of their influence continued to expand. They had discovered in the upper room that God answers prayers. Then they received the empowering of the Holy Spirit and discovered that God was directing their prayer through the ministry of the Holy Spirit [Romans 8:27]. These experiences transformed the early church so that they became the spiritual powerhouse that God intended and a paradigm for every succeeding generation.

Following Pentecost, Peter and John were imprisoned, but the church was gathered, presumably praying for their release. Following their release, the believers responded to the threat of persecution and prayed for boldness. As a result, the place was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness [Acts 4:31]. God was manifest in a tangible way to demonstrate the effectiveness of prayer and encourage the believers in their dependence upon the God who answers prayer.

As the church continued to expand, there were growing pains. As the church was providing for the needs of widows, a dispute arose between two groups regarding perceived preferential treatment. The disciples determined that they needed to delegate the responsibility to other appointed leaders who would care for the widows' needs and help resolve the conflict. In this manner, the twelve would be able to devote their time more fully to prayer and the ministry of the Word. At this point, the Apostles clearly understood the necessity and importance of prayer. As seven men were selected to care for the widows, the Apostles prayed for them. The seven then ministered to the need. But the twelve made prayer and the ministry of the Word

their priority. The result was that the Word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly [Acts 6:1-7].

In Acts 12, we see how the church learned that God delights to respond to the prayers of His people even when our prayers are weak. King Herod had killed James, the brother of John. He then arrested Peter and intended to kill him at the end of the Passover celebration. Peter was imprisoned, to be kept until the end of the feast, and then executed. The Passover Feast was nearly over; it was the last night of the Passover Week. Early the next morning, Peter was to be taken out and beheaded.

The situation appeared hopeless. Peter was secure in the dungeon of a well protected fortress. There were sixteen guards posted, and on either side of him there were guards chained to his wrists. How could the church deliver Peter from his pit of peril? Perhaps they could send ambassadors to seek an audience with Herod, organize a protest, start a boycott, promote civil disobedience, or generate a petition drive soliciting the signatures of Jerusalem's leading citizens? What the church did was utilize their most powerful weapon to set Peter free from prison... they prayed.

In response to the prayers of God's people, He dispatched an angel who miraculously freed Peter. Peter was set free from his chains and guided silently past the guards and gates undetected. When Peter and the angel came to the city gate, it miraculously opened to them of its own accord as an automatic garage door would open. They went out of the city and down one street, and the angel disappeared. Peter reflected on what had just happened and realized that God had miraculously set him free. He then went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, the author of the second gospel. In Acts 12:12, we are told that many were gathered together praying. There is a wonderful dynamic in group prayer. What a blessing it is to see many gathered together in prayer. How long they were gathered we do not know, but the implication is that they had been praying for several hours, since Peter was delivered in the middle of the night.

What were the people who were praying expecting? There the church was gathered offering constant prayer to God for Peter. But did they really expect God to respond? As Peter knocked on the gate, a girl named Rhoda went to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so excited that she ran to tell the good news to the people who were praying and forgot to open the gate for him. The prayer group essentially told her that she was crazy and to quit disturbing them because they were busy praying for Peter. As Peter kept knocking, they finally came to the gate and discovered that it was, in fact, Peter; God had responded to their prayers. Luke tells us they were astonished. I try to imagine their startled expressions as they gazed upon Peter.

R.A. Torrey observed that Rhoda is the only person at the prayer meeting who is mentioned by name. Even though the church leaders were present, it is only Rhoda who is mentioned among the many who prayed. It appears that Rhoda is the only one mentioned because she was the

only one who believed that God had answered the prayers of His people. "Rhoda" means rose and this rose was very fragrant to God because of her faith.

Here, the church learned the important lesson that God is faithful despite our weakness. As they prayed, they were seeking God earnestly, but they did not truly expect that God would respond. Yet despite their weakness, God answered and delivered. God provides this lesson to encourage us. God wants us to participate in prayer, even when our faith is weak.

On another occasion, when the church at Antioch prayed, God responded and directed Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. As they spent time worshiping God in prayer, the Holy Spirit said: *"Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. They continued to fast and pray, and then they commissioned them and sent them out"* [Acts 13:1-3]. Through this prayer meeting, the gospel went forth into the outermost parts of the world.

When Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi [Acts 16], they were praying and singing to God at midnight, and the other prisoners were listening to them. More importantly, the God of heaven and earth was listening. The prayers were answered by an earthquake that opened the prison doors. This was the first example of "Jailhouse Rock." God responded to the earnest prayers of the early church in a powerful way to demonstrate His authority and to draw people to Himself.

It is evident that the early church was a powerful church that turned the world for Jesus. Yet they were just like us. They simply decided to participate and pray. They believed in the power of prayer; they prayed powerfully, and God responded in a powerful way. This is a model for every succeeding generation of the Church. God assures us that He has not changed. How exciting it is to realize that as we pray, God will respond, and the world will be changed. Therefore, the church needs to return to the example of the early church and depend upon Him in prayer.

## Chapter 3: The Benefits of Prayer and the Obstacles to Prayer

### *The benefits of prayer*

We are likely to be encouraged to pray when we better understand some of the blessings of prayer. Here is a snapshot of some of the benefits:

#### **Honors God**

Our prayers actually honor or glorify God. Consider the picture of worship in the Book of Revelation: *“Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints”* [Revelation 5:8].

*“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand”* [Revelation 8:2-4].

These passages teach us that our prayers are sacrifices, or offerings to God. The sacrifice on the altar of incense was intended to bring glory to, or honor God. The incense offered on the altar in the Tabernacle and the Temple was a symbol and expressed the prayers of the Hebrews, which were considered a pleasant aroma offered to God. Similarly, the church offers prayer to God as a sacrifice to honor God. The more we pray, the greater the sacrifices are that we present to God. As we learn to pray, it allows us to bring greater glory to God in our prayers. We are motivated to pray because of our love for God and our desire to honor Him.

#### **Builds up/edifies**

Prayer is an exercise in faith that builds up the believer and strengthens our faith: *“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit”* [Jude 1:20].

As we learn to pray and experience intimate communication with God, we soon discover that we are growing spiritually. Prayer is a means for spiritual acorns to become mighty spiritual oak trees.

#### **Peace**

Prayer is a means to God’s peace despite the circumstances: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* [Philippians 4:6-8].

All of us experience fear, especially in troubling circumstances. Yet God tells us not to be anxious about anything. To have peace in the midst of a storm surpasses my understanding. But God assures me that the way to have this peace is to tell Him the things that concern me and to make my requests known to Him. He also reminds me that I should have an attitude of thanksgiving. I can be grateful even for difficult circumstances because I know that my God cares for me and I can be grateful because I know that He hears me. When Corrie Ten Boom was in a concentration camp in World War II, she was held by the Nazis in a barrack that was infested with lice. Her sister urged her to give thanks to God, even in those incredibly difficult circumstances. As they prayed and gave thanks, they began to experience God's peace. They soon discovered that the Nazi guards avoided inspections of their barrack, because it was infested, and they were able to share the Bible and the gospel with countless women.

God promises to guard our minds and our hearts through Christ Jesus. Jesus will protect our emotions and our thoughts so that we don't have to worry but can trust God. Jesus raised the widow's son, Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus from the dead, and He provided the Temple tax for Peter from the mouth of a fish. He cares about the big things and the little things and everything in between. That's why Peter urges us, "*casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*" [1 Peter 5:7]. We can give all our cares to God, leave them with Him, and not worry about them. Instead, we can experience His peace.

## **Wisdom**

Many times we are faced with a need to make a decision, and the right answer seems elusive. We want the ability to make the right decisions, and this requires wisdom. Wisdom is the key to knowing what God would have us do in a particular situation. The religious leaders of Jesus' day sought to alienate Him from the people, so they developed a scheme to show that He was a harsh man or that He did not follow the Mosaic Law. As Jesus was teaching, they presented a woman who had been caught committing adultery. They challenged Jesus that the Law of Moses said that the woman ought to be stoned, but what did He say? Jesus initially responded by merely stooping to the ground and writing in the dirt with His finger. Perhaps He wrote the religious leaders' secret sins because He then raised Himself up and said to them, "*He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.*" And again, He stooped down and wrote on the ground, and the religious leaders were convicted and departed [John 8:1-12].

Just when the religious leaders thought they had Jesus trapped, He demonstrated the Wisdom of God. Not only am I amazed by the Lord's display of wisdom, but I marvel at the fact that He wants to impart this wisdom to us. When Solomon became King, he loved God, and the Lord offered to give him the desire of his heart. Solomon requested an understanding heart to discern between good and evil and rightly rule God's people. The request so pleased God that He imparted wisdom such that there has not been a wiser man on the planet except Jesus. Solomon's wisdom was soon tested. Two women approached the King and claimed to be the true mother of an infant. Solomon suggested that the baby be split in two and that each mother receive half. The true mother was moved with compassion for her child and quickly offered to relinquish the child to the other woman, that it might be spared. Solomon

immediately realized that she was the true mother and ordered the child to be given to her [1 Kings 3:1-28].

God has promised to give us an abundance of wisdom if we will ask: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him"* [James 1:5].

There are so many difficult decisions that we must frequently decide. What a blessing it is to know God wants to give us wisdom so that we don't need to be limited to our own intellect. Accordingly, we should pray that God impart wisdom to us and then have confidence that He will. We can pray for wisdom generally, as well as wisdom for a particular situation. For example, as a parent you want God's wisdom in a general sense as you raise your children. You also need God's wisdom for specific situations. If we seek God, He will give us His wisdom.

### **Direction**

In some respects direction is related to wisdom. But I want to further develop the concept that God will direct our paths as we seek Him in prayer so that we can have confidence that we are following His will for us. For example, trying to determine whether to accept a job offer, move to a new community or a new church, or whether to begin a relationship can be challenging. If God has not specifically revealed His will in His Word on these issues, we can still know His will. God invites us, and expects us, to come to Him in prayer to receive direction. The essential theme is that we should pray to determine God's direction rather than merely looking at the circumstances.

Consider two examples of this principle provided in the Old Testament. First, consider the example of Abraham's servant. The servant was sent on a mission to find a bride for Isaac, Abraham's son. He prayed for God to lead and direct and asked God for a sign to confirm His will: *"Then he said, 'O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink' —let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master'"* [Genesis 24:12-14 ].

And it happened before he even finished his prayer request that Rebekah came forth and offered the servant a drink and offered to water the camels...the exact sign the servant had requested. At this point in the story, I marvel because I probably would be jumping, and thanking God, and telling Rebekah the good news. But Abraham's servant did not do anything... but pray. He sought to determine whether the Lord had in fact been directing. Remember the essential theme is we should pray to determine God's direction rather than merely look at the circumstances.

In contrast to Abraham's servant, consider the failure of Joshua to pray in entering a covenant with the Gibeonites in a portion of Scripture that could be called "Trick or Treaty" [Joshua 9]. The Gibeonites sent ambassadors to Joshua; they came wearing worn garments and weathered sandals, and they carried old wineskins, old sacks, and dry bread. They told the leaders of the Hebrews they had traveled a great distance and when their journey began, how everything they carried was new, but now it was old. They explained that they were seeking a peace treaty because of the fame of the God of the Hebrews. At first, the Hebrews were reluctant to enter the agreement because they suspected that the ambassadors might be from a neighboring enemy, but once they inspected the provisions, they agreed to a peace covenant.

The woeful failure and solemn warning are simply stated: *"Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD"* [Joshua 9:14].

The leaders of Israel were fooled because they looked upon the circumstances but failed to seek direction from the Lord through prayer.

God desires to direct us. Many of the pitfalls and dangerous detours can be avoided if we simply seek His direction first through prayer. For example, you may be offered a Hawaiian vacation for an amazingly low fare. The deal is incredible and appears to be the opportunity of a lifetime. Before you decide to accept the offer, seek God's direction through prayer. It may be God's will to bless you with the island paradise vacation. On the other hand, God might spare you from a nightmare trip.

In summary, we have considered just some of the benefits of prayer: it honors God, builds us up, gives us God's peace, gives us His wisdom, and allows Him to direct us. Truly the benefits of prayer are far too numerous and wonderful to try and fully consider in this context, but that should not deter us from seeking to experience them in their fullness.

### ***The obstacles to prayer***

What are some of the obstacles that keep us from participating in prayer? As we consider the obstacles and learn some tips for prayer, the goal is to enable us to participate in prayer. Here are some potential obstacles.

The primary obstacle to prayer is that it is spiritual work. Our fleshly nature does not like the spiritual effort required. Frequently, we experience periods or seasons where we don't pray at all. Prayer is the most ancient, most universal, and most intensive expression of spiritual desire. It ranges from the simple to sublime. Although we intuitively recognize the importance of prayer, we often find it difficult to pray. An equal or greater danger is being satisfied with a shallow prayer experience where our lives have never been transformed by intimate communication with God. E.M. Bounds describes the danger of a complacent prayer life as follows: "Spiritual work is taxing work, and men are loath to do it. Praying, true praying, costs an outlay of serious attention and of time, which flesh and blood do not relish. Few persons are made of strong fiber that they will make a costly outlay when surface work will pass as well in

the market. We can habituate ourselves to our beggarly praying until it looks well to us; at least it keeps up a decent form and quiets conscience—the deadliest of opiates.”

Jesus sought to pray with the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane hours before His arrest and crucifixion [Matthew 26:36-46]. Three times Jesus came over to the disciples and found them sleeping rather than praying. Jesus observed, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” The second time, He came to the disciples and found that they were asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. Again, the flesh had victory over the spirit. Jesus’ disappointment is noted in His inquiry to the disciples: *“What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?”* [Matthew 26:40] Truly, we can relate to the disciples and the battle between the flesh and the spirit. The key is to recognize that prayer is a spiritual work requiring spiritual discipline. Pray and ask God to give you the diligence to pray.

A second obstacle, related to the first, is time. J. Oswald Sanders says, “Mastering the art of prayer, like any other art, will take time, and the amount of time we allocate to it will be the true measure of our conception of its importance. We contrive to find time for that which we deem most important.” Martin Luther, a man who was used by God to usher in the Protestant Reformation, commented, “I’m too busy not to pray.” George Mueller told a man who had “too much to do” to spend proper time with God; “That four hours of work for which one hour of prayer prepares, is far better than five hours of work without prayer.” The solution to the time issue is to learn to schedule prayer time and be sensitive to divine appointments that the Lord has scheduled for us as times to pray.

A third obstacle is that we don’t believe that prayer is effective. We have not come to truly believe that the True and Living God is really listening to the cries of our heart and desires to respond, and longs to communicate with us so that our lives can be transformed. Essentially, we have not come to believe that prayer works. We, like the disciples, are limited in spiritual power because of unbelief. But Jesus encourages us: *“Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you”* [Matthew 17:20]. As we grow in our faith, we discover that God will move mountains through prayer; He is just waiting for us to ask in confidence.

A fourth obstacle is rebellion and disobedience. We need to seek to live a life that is pleasing in His sight, and we need to desire to keep His commandments [1 John 3:22]. God assures us that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. But He also warns us that our sin is an obstacle to fruitful prayer: *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded”* [James 4:8]

We must choose whether we want to follow God or whether we will continue to disobey. Sitting on a picket fence with one foot yielding to God and one foot in rebellion is an uncomfortable place. We need to stop being double-minded and become single-purposed in a life that seeks to yield to God. Then we can draw closer to God and experience the blessings of fruitful prayer.



A fifth obstacle to prayer is our selfishness. *“Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures”* [James 4:2-3]. God reminds us that our motives in prayer are extremely important. James observes that in addition to the problem of not praying, there is a problem with prayers that are motivated by selfishness. Ultimately, the desire of our prayers should be God’s glory [John 14:13; 17:1; 1Corinthians 10:31]. Nevertheless, we have personal needs that God has instructed us to lay before Him in prayer. Accordingly, the mere fact that a need is personal does not make it selfish. The problem relates to motive.

For example, the first time I prayed to receive the gift of tongues my motive was selfish. I was not truly concerned with God’s glory or being able to pray or praise God through the Spirit. My motive was selfish because I wanted my friends to think that I was a spiritual person because I had received the gift of tongues. Putting aside the obvious irony, the problem was that I was motivated by selfishness. We need to be careful that we consider whether our motive is primarily selfish or pure.

A sixth obstacle can be created by our service to God. We must be careful that we don’t become so busy serving God that we neglect to communicate with God in prayer. The leaders of the early church recognized this danger. As the church ministered to the community by feeding widows, a dispute arose between two groups. The apostles realized that it would not be good for them to neglect prayer and their teaching ministry to serve in this area: *“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word”* [Acts 6:3-4].

The disciples recognized the importance of serving, but they also realized the importance of finding a proper balance so that they could preserve time for prayer. Also, they wisely concluded that prayer is the priority. Certainly, God wants a relationship with us more than our labor.

In summary, we have considered some of the obstacles to prayer: the spiritual nature of prayer and the conflict with our flesh, our schedules, skepticism, sin, selfishness, and serving. Unfortunately, we have only considered a partial list of the obstacles to fruitful prayer. Therefore, we must be on guard to avoid all obstacles.

## Chapter 4: Tips for Prayer

First, schedule a prayer time. We need to set aside time to pray. Prayer is a sacrifice to God. In the Mosaic Law, the Jews were instructed to give God their best. Robert Murray Mc Cheyne said, "I feel it is far better to begin with God - to see His face first, to get my soul near Him before it is near another." There is certainly wisdom in setting apart the beginning of the day to spend time with God to prepare us by meeting Him before we meet the world. Yet mornings might not be the best time for everyone. Find a part of your day that is best for you and dedicate that time to God. You may find that it works best for you to dedicate multiple portions of your day to prayer. For example, you might schedule prayer in the morning, at lunch, and before bed. This is similar to the custom of the Jews to gather at a sanctuary for public prayer three times a day.

As you begin to set aside time, it may be helpful to start with an expectation that the amount of time you spend in prayer will increase. For instance, you might start by dedicating ten minutes to pray and expect to increase to twenty and then thirty minutes, etc. Plan accordingly.

A second tip is to set aside a place of prayer. Jesus went to a solitary place to pray [Mark 1:35] and often withdrew into the wilderness to pray [Luke 5:15-16]. Jesus shows by example the need to find a place where we are free from distractions so that we can speak with God. Similarly, He teaches us this principle in connection with His introductory teaching to the model prayer: *"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"* [Matthew 6:6]. The immediate context of His teaching related to a contrast between the religious leaders, who sought to pray for the approval of people listening, and believers, who are to pray for the approval of God. But the application focuses on the principle of *going into your room and shutting the door*. When you are praying to God, you need to identify a place in which you can hear from God without distractions.

We discover the same principle as we consider the life of Abraham. As Abraham followed God, he established altars to set aside a place where he would meet with God [Genesis 12:7-8, 13:3-4, 18].

In our lives we need to set aside a place to communicate with God. Consistent with Jesus' teaching, there should be a place we associate with prayer. Perhaps you pray in bed or kneeling by the bed. Maybe it's a favorite chair in the living room or at a desk in a home office. Some people will commune with God while reading their Bible at the dining room or kitchen table. Others tend to associate a place outside of the home such as the mountains, the ocean, or a river as the site where they meet with God. The nature of the location is not as important as our association that this is the place where we meet God.

A third tip is, learn to verbalize prayer. Sometimes we are uncomfortable speaking our prayers, especially when others are present. We should learn to speak our prayers rather than simply

thinking our prayers. Jesus taught, *“When you pray say...”* We should note that Jesus did not instruct us *“When you pray think...”* Prayer should be loud enough for us to hear ourselves praying. In this manner, our prayer life becomes more tangible, and we are strengthened. Certainly, the Father knows our prayers and our needs before we even think them. Therefore the instruction to say our prayers rather than merely thinking them must be for our benefit. Remember Jesus had already told the disciples to pray in a manner that they were not trying to be heard by others. Accordingly, we are left with the conclusion that speaking our prayers must be for our benefit.

I want to be careful not to imply that God won't hear our prayers unless they are spoken. Certainly our connection with God does not depend on the spoken word of prayer. Nevertheless, I have observed that as people begin to pray out loud, they become more comfortable speaking with God.

A fourth tip is to realize that prayers can be very simple. We need to understand that God wants to communicate with us because He loves us and cares for us. He is not impressed by our vocabulary and certainly does not desire a special “prayer voice.” Sometimes we hear pastors pray in public with extra tremolo in their voice so that it sounds like, “Dear Goooooooood...” It would certainly seem awkward to speak with a friend in that manner, “Hey Joooooooooe...” Remember God is seeking a simple conversation with us, and He wants to be a friend. Sometimes when we hear other people pray with great eloquence, we can be intimidated and think God will not be pleased with simple prayer. We are encouraged to participate when we discover that God does not require eloquence.

A fifth tip is to anticipate that God wants to speak with you as well as hear from you. We must learn to recognize the sound of God's voice if we are going to speak with Him. When Samuel was a young man, God began to speak to him. At first, Samuel did not recognize the voice of God and assumed that it was Eli, the priest, who was calling. Three times God spoke, but Samuel did not know it was God's voice. After the third time, Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy and said to Samuel, *“Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears.’ Then the LORD said to Samuel: ...”* [1 Samuel 3:9-11]. Samuel was young and had not yet learned that God wanted to speak with him. God used Eli to help Samuel recognize God's voice and to encourage him to ask God to speak. Samuel affirmed to God that he wanted to hear Him speak, and in response, God spoke.

When God revealed Himself to the prophet Elijah, He did not manifest His call in the strong wind that tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord. Nor did He manifest His call in the earthquake or the fire, but in a still small voice. When Elijah acknowledged the voice, the Lord continued to speak and direct the man of God [1 Kings 19:11-13]. God continues to speak to us through His Word and prayer in a still small voice. When we are praying and reading the Bible and we sense that God is speaking to us, He probably is. It is

reasonable for us to have an impression that God is speaking to us as we seek Him. The “voice” of God may not be audible but it is tangible. We need to be sensitive to the sound of His voice.

A sixth tip is, maintain a list of prayer requests. A journal can record your prayer requests and God’s responses. It can be very helpful to maintain a list of the concerns and passions that we want to pray about. Certainly, God will move by His Spirit to direct our prayer and bring issues to our attention and remembrance. But a short pencil can sometimes assist along memory. It is helpful to have a list of some of the needs that you want to bring to God’s attention. You may also want to start a prayer journal. You can use the journal to record your prayer requests and God’s answered prayers. This becomes a tangible reminder of God’s faithfulness and gives us greater confidence that prayer is effective.

A seventh tip is, pray with others. When Jesus began the model prayer, “Our Father,” He may have intended to imply that believers would be praying together and acknowledging their common relationship with God. We certainly see the pattern of group prayer in the life of the early church. As the disciples gathered in anticipation of the gift of the Holy Spirit, they prayed together in the Upper Room [Acts 1:14]. After the birth of the Church at Pentecost, they continued to pray steadfastly [Acts 2:42]. Peter and John were on their way to the temple at the hour of prayer to pray with the assembly when God used Peter to miraculously heal the lame man [Acts 3:1]. As persecution began against the church, they responded by praying together for boldness [Acts 4:23-41]. Later the disciples were gathered together in prayer seeking God’s intervention for Peter’s release from prison [Acts 12:1-19].

When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He sought the comfort and encouragement of the disciples praying with Him [Matthew 26:36-45]. There is a benefit from group prayer as we encourage one another. It should be noted that the group need not be large; Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” [Matthew 18:20]. Religious Jews sought to establish a group of ten or more males to pray. But Jesus promised that, regardless of the size of the group gathering in His name, He would be there. Find a prayer partner or a group of people to pray with, and you will experience growth in your prayer life.

In this section, we have considered the following practical tips: scheduled prayer time, identify a site for prayer, learn to speak our prayers, keep prayers simple (like talking to a friend), learn to identify the sound of God’s voice, maintain a series of prayer requests and answered prayers, and pray with others to experience the dynamic of group prayer. As you utilize these tips you will find it easier to participate in prayer.

## **Participation Study Guide**

1. Why should we pray?
2. Consider the intimacy and intensity of Jesus' prayers. What have you learned about prayer from Jesus?
3. What do you believe are some of the benefits of prayer?
4. What do you consider to be the most difficult obstacle to prayer; what has God revealed to you about this obstacle?

## **Section Two: Person**

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Your name."

In this section we consider to whom we are praying. We will focus on the following themes regarding the person and prayer:

**relationship**

**residence**

**respect**

**revelation**

## Chapter 5: Relationship and Residence

### *Relationship*

Since we are going to participate in prayer, it is good to know who the person is to whom we are praying. Jesus emphasizes the person of prayer by initially informing us of the relationship we can have when we pray. Five times in Matthew 6:5-9 Jesus assures us that we are praying to our Father. Jesus distinguishes the intimate relationship of communicating with God from ritual and religion.

Jesus has a unique relationship with God that allows Him to address His prayers to “My” Father. Six or more times we hear Jesus refer to God as “My Father.” Although Jesus typically referred to God as Father He also addressed His prayers calling upon God as Abba. For example, *“Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will”* [Mark 14:36]. “Abba” is an Aramaic expression of endearment that is the equivalent of “Papa”. This is a picture of an intimate relationship with the person of God like a parent with a child. There is no evidence in the Old Testament or the writings of the Hebrews of anyone before Jesus addressing God as Father. What amazes me is that God invites us to share that same intimate relationship: *“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’”* [Romans 8:15]. *“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”* [Galatians 4:6]

Only those who receive Jesus Christ and believe on Him can refer to God as Father. We can experience God as creator apart from Jesus, but it is only through Jesus that we can relate to God as our Father or Papa. The most important reason to pray is to know God; God wants such an intimate relationship that He invites you to call Him “Papa.” My children generally call me “Dad,” but sometimes I hear them call me “Daddy.” When my children call me Daddy, it always sounds so special to me. It appears that there are generally three situations where they are likely to call me Daddy. The first is if something has scared them. The second is if they want something, and they think they are more likely to receive it by reminding me of our relationship. The third is if they are feeling close and they are comfortable approaching me like a small child. In a similar way, I’m likely to call God Abba or Papa when I’m scared, feel needy, or when I feel very close to Him.

I am comforted knowing that God is a person who is described as a personal and caring Father. Even if your experience with your earthly father was less than ideal, you can still be encouraged that God seeks to relate as a perfect father. He does not have any of the limitations that I have as a person but He still demonstrates the attributes of a person. For example, God loves, He feels, He cares, He reasons, and He hears. It is essential that we begin to appreciate God as a person. Our God is not merely some impersonal spiritual force like a “higher power.” The psalmist declares how this truth impacts his relationship with God: *“I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live”* [Psalm 116:1-2]. There are a multitude of reasons why we should

love the Lord, but the psalmist is moved to love God because God hears his prayers. Because God hears his prayers, the psalmist affirms that he will pray to God as long as he lives.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit lead us into God's presence and make God real to us [Ephesians 2:18, John 14:7-9]. It is part of their ministry to help us to know the person of God our Father. Worship, adoration, and relationship all flow from a proper identification of who God is. In Psalm 115:1-8, we learn that we become like what we worship. So, who is the God to whom we pray? We can learn much about who God is by examining the covenant names of God. The names of God teach us about the nature of God. Moses sought to see the glory of God. Then God said, *"I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you"* [Exodus 33:18-19]. By declaring His name, He revealed His nature and His glory. The following is a list of some of the covenant names of the LORD and where they are first mentioned in Scripture:

Jehovah-Tsidkenu [*tsid-kay'-noo*] [God our righteousness] Jeremiah 23:6

Jehovah-M'kaddesh [*mah-kaw-dash'*] [God who sanctifies] Exodus 31:13

Jehovah-Shalom [*shaw-lome'*] [God our peace] Judges 6:24

Jehovah-Shammah [*shawm'-mah*] [God is here] Ezekiel 48:35

Jehovah-Rophe [*raw-faw'*] [God heals] Exodus 15:26

Jehovah-Jireh [*yir-eh'*] [God provides] Genesis 22:14

Jehovah-Rohi [*ro-ee'*] [God my shepherd] Psalm 23:1

Jehovah-Hoseenu [*aw-saw'noo*] [God our maker] Psalm 95:6.

As I consider the names of God, I become better aware of His character and His nature. I also begin to better understand my relationship with God and how He wants to respond to my prayers. For example, knowing that God is my righteousness lets me know that He wants to restore me so that I can be right with Him. Knowing that He sanctifies assures me that He will help me to be set apart to Him. When I discern that God is peace, I ask Him to give me His peace when my circumstances cause me to be afraid, and He gives me peace despite the circumstances. When I discover that He is here, I ask Him to remind me of His presence and I am comforted. When I understand that He is my Provider, I am confident that He will respond to my needs and provide. As I realize that He is my Shepherd, I begin to appreciate that He wants to protect me, guide me, and bring satisfaction to my life. When I grasp that He is my Maker, I can trust that He has a plan and purpose for my life and that life is not a result of random events without meaning.

God wants us to know who He is to encourage us to have a relationship with Him. We should not cry out to God to deliver us without a desire to have a relationship with Him. He is not a genie.

Once we begin to understand who God is and that He wants a relationship with us, we want to consider the nature of the relationship. Not only does God desire to relate with us as a Father, but He also wants to relate to us as a friend. Consider Abraham, a man who was called by God and responded with an attitude of dependence and acts of obedience. Because Abraham



trusted God, he is considered an example of faith or a true believer [see Romans 4:11-15, Hebrews 11:8, and Galatians 3:7]. In addition, Abraham is also called God's friend [2 Chronicles 20:7].

Similarly, in the New Testament, God affirms His desire to relate to us as friends through the person of Jesus. Jesus gathered His disciples to encourage and instruct them. It was the Passover and only hours before His arrest and imminent crucifixion. The things He spoke were of the utmost importance. There in the Upper Room, Jesus emphasized the relationship between God and His followers: *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you"* [John 15:13-15]. Three times Jesus identifies us as His friends. He assures us that if we strive to be obedient to God, we are His friends; as His friends, He reveals God to us, and God will communicate with us.

In this context, we better understand Jesus' teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. He encourages us to keep our prayers simple and sincere [Matthew 6:5-7] and not to become entangled by a perceived need for eloquence or formal language. We talk with God as we talk with a friend. When we communicate with a friend, we spend time talking, and we spend time listening. We understand that there is no minimum time requirement to communicate with a friend. We can send a quick e-mail, write a short note in a card, or make a brief phone call. In a similar manner, we can pray to God.

For example, in the life of Nehemiah, we learn that a short prayer will certainly reach God if the person praying is close to Him. Nehemiah was the Persian king's assistant, and he wanted to go to Jerusalem to help his people, the Hebrews, rebuild the wall around the city. But Nehemiah was afraid to ask the king because the king had previously opposed the idea. One day, Nehemiah looked sad, and the king was surprised to see him in that state. As Nehemiah explained to the king that he was sad because of the condition of his people, the king responded and asked, "What do you request?" Nehemiah did not immediately respond to the king, but instead we read, "So I prayed to the God of heaven" [Nehemiah 2:4]. Under the circumstances, with the king looking at Nehemiah and waiting for a response, it is safe to assume that Nehemiah's prayer to God was brief. But despite the brevity of the request, God responded. Good friends are like that. *"The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth"* [Psalms 145:18].

Good friendships are intimate relationships that are formed and fashioned through time. The more time we spend together, the more intimate our relationship becomes. When you ask young children what they like to do with their friends, they will generally respond by focusing on play activities. As you talk with older people about what they like to do with friends, they are more likely to respond by focusing on communication. It is a process of spiritual maturity that stirs us to desire greater intimacy in our communication with God as we develop our relationship as friends.

Simply stated, God wants to relate to us as a perfect Dad with His kids, and He also wants to relate to us as a friend. As we begin to approach God as a friend, and as a perfect Dad, He continues to reveal Himself in greater detail to us.

### ***Residence***

Not only is it important to know to whom we address our prayers, but also to know where we address our prayers. Our Father is in heaven. As Jesus gathered the disciples in the Upper Room, *He looked up to heaven* and prayed [John 17:1]. Nehemiah's favorite name for God was, "The God of heaven." When Jesus began to teach us about prayer, He reminded us not to pray to seek approval from men but from God: *"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"* [Matthew 6:6]. He describes the Father as being in the "secret place," not in the sense that He is hiding from us, but in the sense that God is in heaven, and we are here on earth.

The fact that God is in heaven reminds us that He is sovereign. *"But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases"* [Psalms 115:3]. God is not required to respond to our every whim and fancy. Accordingly, teaching which over-emphasizes our faith so that we make God our spiritual clerk, is contrary to the Bible. Nevertheless, He has assured us that when we pray consistent with His will, He will answer our prayers.

Knowing that God is in heaven keeps us focused on heaven. It is good to realize that God is above our circumstances. When children are small, they will put their hand in front of their face and be convinced that their hand is bigger than the sun. Sometimes when we are in a difficult situation, it seems that our circumstances are bigger than the Son. It is good for us to realize that our God is in heaven and that He transcends heaven and earth. He is more than able to take care of what concerns us today.

Although God is in heaven, it is important to know that He is not far away. As we diligently seek him, He will be found and will bless; *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* [Hebrews 11:6]. The horizon is a picture of where heaven and earth meet. In DaVinci's masterpiece, "The Last Supper," the disciples are partaking of the Passover meal. In the center of the composition, we see Jesus. Behind Jesus is an open window where we see the horizon. The artist depicts a great spiritual truth that Jesus connects heaven and earth. He is the place where heaven and earth meet. Accordingly, God hears from heaven and responds by interceding in the affairs of men here on earth. When we pray we never hear a voice message system telling us, "If there is an actual emergency press nine," or "God is unavailable so leave a message, and He will respond as soon as He can."

Prayer brings us as close to God as possible. Consider the altar of incense used in the Tabernacle and Temple [Exodus 30:1-10]. The altar was just outside the Holy of Holies. It was a picture of being as close as we can possibly get to God without literally being in His presence. In

Psalm 141:1-2, we see that the incense, rising as it does with smoke, is a picture of the prayers of the saints rising to heaven. Luke 1:10 teaches us that it was the custom of believers to gather outside the tabernacle of prayer at the time of the incense offering, indicating a connection between the two. In Revelation 5:8, we see the prayers of the saints being symbolized by incense brought before the Lamb in heaven. Again, in Revelation 8:3-4, we see that the incense on the golden altar in heaven is actually the prayers of the saints. When we begin to understand the significance of prayer from the perspective of heaven, we begin to appreciate the value of prayer here on earth.

The altar of incense is a beautiful picture of prayer. But not all prayer is fragrant incense to the Lord. The Lord gave specific instruction regarding the burning of incense. Leviticus 16:12 instructs that fire for the incense is to come from the bronze altar in the outer court. The bronze altar was where sacrifice for sin was offered. In other words, we must first deal with the issue of sin before we draw close to God. Prayer is a sacrifice to God that can only be offered by those who desire a relationship with Him. If we choose to live a life that is opposed to God, we have no reason to believe that God hears our prayers, *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear"* [Psalms 66:18]. In other words, God determines the guidelines and the terms of the relationship with us. If we desire a relationship with Him, prayer is an available means to connect heaven and earth.

## Chapter 6: Respect and Revelation

### **Respect**

Jesus told us to pray, *"Hallowed be Your name."* We are not praying for God to become holy but to remind us to treat Him as holy. "Hallowed" means: to make holy, or to sanctify. Jesus refers to the Father as "Holy Father" [John 17:11] and "Righteous Father" [John 17:25]. The Son shows reverence, or respect, for God. The key is for us to approach God in prayer with an appreciation for the need to balance between boldness and respect. Because of what Jesus has done, we can approach God with confidence and without fear: *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus"* [Hebrews 10:19]. *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* [Hebrews 4:16]. We must begin to appreciate that we have been given this great access to God because of Jesus' sacrifice for us, not because of who we are, what we have done, or even the greatness of the need.

Those in heaven also demonstrate respect for God: *"The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!' Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 'You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created'"* [Revelation 4:8-11]. The angelic beings who are in the presence of God are constantly declaring that God is holy. Similarly, the twenty-four elders, who are a picture of the church, demonstrate respect in their worship of God as they fall before Him and declare that He is worthy of worship.

The prophet Isaiah saw a vision of God's throne and described the account as follows: *"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!'"* [Isaiah 6:1-8]. The seraphim continually declare that God is holy. They praise and worship God for who He is. It should be noted that these six winged angelic beings use two of their wings to cover their face and two of their wings to cover their feet. This is a picture of reverence for God.

As Isaiah saw the glory of God and the reverent respect that is shown for God in heaven, he became aware of his own shortcomings. Isaiah declares, *"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."* When we begin to appreciate the person of God and His glory, majesty, and holiness, we are moved to a reverent respect for Him. Yet, as soon as Isaiah acknowledged God's holiness and perfection, and his own imperfection, God provided a means of forgiveness. Then their relationship grew as Isaiah sought to honor and worship God.

Solomon made a similar observation: *"Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few"* [Ecclesiastes 5:1-2].

The fact that God is in heaven and we are on earth should impress upon us the need for respect and humility as we approach God.

In Myanmar [Burma], children are taught to give objects to their parents and elders with both hands. In Asia, it is considered impolite to use only one hand to give a business card to someone. Similarly, it would be considered offensive to toss a business card across a table to a recipient. In 1 Chronicles 13, we see how important it is to show respect for God. David had good intentions when he sought to return the ark back to Jerusalem. David placed the ark on a cart and proceeded to travel toward Jerusalem. When the oxen that pulled the cart stumbled, it appeared that the ark was going to tip over and fall from the cart. Uzza was helping to drive the cart, and when he saw the ark begin to tip, he touched the ark, to prevent it from falling. When Uzza touched the ark, God struck him dead. David was shocked and upset by God's response. Why did the Lord respond so severely?

David came to realize that we must approach God with respect for Him and consistent with God's instructions. God had commanded that the ark be carried by the Levites using poles, not on a cart, nor was anyone to touch it [Exodus 25:14-15; Numbers 3:30-31; 4:15]. David learned important lessons that we must learn. First, God requires us to show respect as we seek to have a relationship with Him. Second, showing respect for God means that we desire to learn what He wants us to do, and then seek to obey Him.

The key is for us to approach God in prayer with an appreciation for the need to balance between boldness and respect. Because of what Jesus has done, we can approach God with confidence and without fear. But we must remember the need to respect God.

### ***Revelation***

God reveals Himself to us so that we can relate to Him. The experience of God's revelation is one of the great blessings of intimate communication with God. At the end of the book of Revelation, God has restored all things and declares that He Himself will dwell with His people and be their God [Revelation 21:3]. This is the greatest attraction of heaven, the presence of God manifest and clearly revealed to us. Until then, God still desires to reveal Himself to those who will seek Him. In the interim, we discover His revelation through prayer, the Word, the ministry of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

One of the great examples of experiencing the revelation of the person of God is seen in the life of Moses. Moses desired to see God perhaps more than any other desire in his life. Moses stood on Mount Sinai and spoke with God face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Yet Moses wanted to know God more. So Moses begged, "Please show me Your glory" [Exodus 33:11, 17]. The Hebrew word *karvod* refers to the profound, glowing, glowing, visible expression of God. It

is the same glory that covered Mount Sinai when the Law was given [Exodus 24:16-17]. Moses wanted to see God revealed. How did Moses learn to communicate with God in such an intimate, life transforming way that he passionately sought to see more of God revealed? Let us look back at the life of Moses.

Moses began his intimate relationship with God when God made Himself manifest in the burning bush [Exodus 3]. God called to Moses from the midst of the burning bush, "Moses, Moses!" and Moses responded, "Here I am." God always initiates the relationship by calling us to Himself. Notice that God called Moses by name. God may not initiate His relationship with us by calling to us from a burning bush, but He always calls each of us on an individual basis and invites us to begin a relationship with Him: "The sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" [John 10:3].

Relationships begin with introductions. God introduces Himself to Moses, "'I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" [Exodus 3:6]. God wants us to know that He is the True and Living God. He is not like the false gods that Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, called upon or the false gods that the Egyptians called upon. But He is the God who revealed Himself to the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not surprising that Moses was afraid. Imagine the burning bush that does not get consumed by the fire and the voice of God calling from the midst. Even if we put those aspects of the experience aside, Moses had a healthy respect for God so he was afraid to look upon Him.

Notice that when Moses' relationship with God began, he was afraid to look upon God. Yet, later he begged to see God. Many of us are afraid to look upon God. We wonder whether it will hurt, what will it cost us, and whether God is for us or against us. God understood Moses' fear. So God immediately assured Moses that He had come to Moses because He cared for His people. God assured Moses that He had seen the oppression the Egyptians had inflicted upon the Hebrews, and He would now deliver His people and use Moses as His agent. Moses immediately focused on his own inadequacies for so great a task. Moses asked, "Who am I...?" So God assured Moses that he would be with Him. Moses would grow to appreciate that this was the greatest experience possible... to know that God is with you.

So Moses moved to a more important inquiry, "Who are you?" It is typical that we begin our relationship with God focused on ourselves. We focus on our strengths, weaknesses, our perceived needs, and desires. Like Moses, we wonder, "Who am I...?" As the relationship develops, we begin to focus more on God, "Who are you?" "Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they say to me, "What is His name?" what shall I say to them?' And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you"' [Exodus 3:13-14]. God is all sufficient for whatever our need is. The name proclaims God as self-existent, self-sufficient, eternal, and sovereign. God let Moses know in the beginning of their relationship that regardless of difficult circumstances God is still God and has everything under control. This was to be the message that Moses would communicate to

the Hebrews, and this was to be God's memorial to all people for all generations.

"Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness".' And Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go'" [Exodus 5:1-2]. God's desire is that His people will be free to worship Him. God wants His people to be able to commune with Him. In contrast to Moses, Pharaoh responds, "Who is the LORD...? I do not know the LORD..." Moses asked, "Who is the Lord?" in an effort to identify God and establish a relationship. Pharaoh, on the other hand, asked in defiance, disbelief, and determined self-will.

Pharaoh sought to demonstrate his own sovereignty in the affairs of Egypt by increasing the burdens upon the Hebrew slaves. These events brought Moses to a crisis in confidence. Moses wondered why God allowed this trouble to come upon His people and why He had not delivered them. It is here that Moses took another quantum leap in his intimate relationship with God. God responds to Moses, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them" [Exodus 6:3-4]. God had appeared to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty (El Shaddai), but He was not known to them by name. Now He will relate to them by His name, YHWH, or Jehovah. God assures Moses that He will deliver the Hebrews from their bondage in Egypt and bring them into the Promised Land. God offers His name as the guarantee of His promise. Effectively, God says because of who He is, we can count on Him to be faithful to His covenant. Here we learn an essential truth of prayer: the better we know God, the greater confidence we will have that He will be faithful to perform His promises. God, in fact, performed His promises to Israel and demonstrated that He is sovereign. The plagues were visited upon Pharaoh and the Hebrews were delivered.

Throughout the time of the plagues, Moses received instruction from God as an ambassador. But as his relationship with God became more intimate, God began to speak with Moses as two men might speak together. In the wilderness, Moses interceded for the people, seeking their provisions and their pardons. In response to Moses' prayers, God sent bread from heaven [manna] and brought forth water from the rock [Exodus 16-17]. When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, Moses went up to the mountain for forty days. There the Lord appeared to the Hebrews with thunder and lightning and the presence of a thick cloud on the mountain [Exodus 19:16, 24:18]. But God was manifest to Moses as He spoke with God, and God answered by voice [Exodus 19:19]. From this glorious encounter came not only the covenant between the Lord and Israel but a deeper bond in the relationship between Moses and God. As Moses received the commandments, the people stood afar off because they were afraid of God. Yet Moses had understood that reverence for God's awesome presence was to keep us from sin, not to keep us from God [Exodus 20:18-21].

So Moses continued to draw closer to God while the multitude remained at a distance. Those who desire to see God revealed are always separated from the multitude. There are not many who venture to the mountain top to meet with God, but for those who do, the experience is

unparalleled. The air is rare, the views are spectacular, and the path is marked by the footprints of those who have shared the breathtaking experience of God's presence.

And when God finished communicating the terms of the covenant to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him two tablets of stone containing the Testimony, written with the finger of God. I try to imagine how Moses must have felt holding the tablets, how he must have held them close to his heart, how the tablets must have felt warm to his heart despite being etched in cold stone, how Moses would hold them tightly as he had learned to hold tightly to the Lord. Moses associated the tablets with the revelation of God. Therefore, he undoubtedly held them close.

When Moses delayed in coming down from Mount Sinai, the people rebelled from God and fashioned a golden calf that became the object of their worship and idolatry. When Moses saw what the people had done, his anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain [Exodus 32:1-19]. How the incident must have grieved Moses. He had drawn so close to God and received the revelation of how Israel would worship and be governed by God. He experienced an intimate relationship with God and wanted to come down from the mountain to find the people eagerly desiring a similar relationship, but instead, the people had sunk to idolatry.

God was ready to destroy the people for their rebellion, but Moses interceded for the people. Moses was even willing to lose his own life in an effort to urge God to relent and spare the Hebrews. Ultimately, God yielded to the impassioned intercession of Moses and agreed to spare the Hebrews. God would be faithful to His promise to deliver the Hebrews to the Promised Land, but the Lord refused to accompany the sinful Israelites on their journey lest He be compelled to destroy them on the way. Instead, He would send an angel as His representative [Exodus 33:1-6].

Moses then went to meet with the Lord. Moses took his tent and set it outside of the camp. The camp itself had been defiled by the sin of the people, so the tent was situated outside of the camp, separated unto God. It came to pass that everyone who sought the Lord went out to this provisional tent erected by Moses called "the tabernacle of meeting." When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud descended, indicating God's presence. Then God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend [Exodus 33:11]. It is not that Moses saw God in His essential being, but Moses had direct, unhindered communion with God. Here, Moses realized the exceeding greatness of the revelation of God. He had drawn so close to God that they now spoke as friends...close, intimate friends.

Certainly, there were many who never left the camp to seek the Lord at the tabernacle of meeting. Similarly, there are many today who do not know the Lord, or who call themselves Christians, and have yet to separate from sin and seek the Lord. This is due to the problems of pride and rebellion. Also, there are many today who are in pursuit of His presence, people who will separate from sin to seek the Lord. But unfortunately, it seems that there are relatively few who will so passionately pursue God that they experience His presence as Moses did.



It should be noted that Moses' assistant Joshua, then a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle. Joshua undoubtedly saw the reality of God displayed in Moses' life and desired to experience the same reality in his own life. Joshua, like Moses, experienced the presence of God, and like Moses, experienced great spiritual success in his life. We can be encouraged by those who have an intimate relationship with God to seek such a relationship, and we can encourage others to desire a closer relationship with God because of our relationship.

Moses appreciated the blessing of God's presence. When God told Moses He would send His angel to lead the people into the Promised Land, but He would not go with them, Moses begged for God's presence to be with His people: "Then he said to Him, 'If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here'" [Exodus 33:15]. For Moses, the primary blessing was not the material blessings of the Promised Land but the great spiritual blessing of God's presence. Moses did not want to go anywhere without God. The Lord graciously promised that His presence would go with them.

Afterward, Moses asked to see the glory of God. Moses was not content with the intimacy level in his relationship with God, and he wanted to see more of God revealed. God replied by promising to reveal Himself as a God of grace and compassion. Moses would be consumed by the glory of God if He saw the unveiled manifestation of God's glory. So God offered to hide Moses in the crack of a rock while God's glory passed by so that Moses could then see God's afterglow as a representation of the full splendor of God's revelation.

Moses would again go up to Mount Sinai to receive the covenant and the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments. There the Lord revealed Himself as a God who is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth. Moses responded to the revelation of God by worshiping and praying for God's presence among His people despite the fact that they were unworthy. This is how we should respond to God's revelation: with prayer and the pursuit of His presence.

When Moses came down with the two tablets, his face was shining as a result of having been in God's presence. The people were afraid to come near him because of the way Moses' face was shining. Clearly, this was not merely a suntan. The Hebrews had labored in the wilderness and in Egypt and were familiar with the effects of the intense sun. They recognized that there was something very different about Moses. Moses was reflecting the glory of God that comes from spending time in His presence. His life was transformed by intimate communication with God.

We learn that when Moses finished speaking to the people all that God had spoken to him, he covered his face with a veil. Why did Moses cover His face? At first blush [pun intended] it appears that Moses covered his face because the people were afraid of Moses' appearance. Paul later explains, in the New Testament, that Moses covered his face so that people would not see the fading glory [2 Corinthians 3:13]. There was a picture of the fading glory of the law which would pale in comparison to the ministry of the Spirit. There is also an important application for us: if we are not in His presence on a regular basis, the reflection of His glory will begin to fade away from our countenance.

Therefore, we see from the life of Moses a role model for seeking the revelation of the person of God. Moses continued to seek more of God and a deeper experience with God. As a result, Moses was transformed so that all who saw him saw the reflection of God upon his face. We too will be transformed as we seek God in prayer.

### **Person Study Guide**

1. How do you relate to God? For example, do you relate to God as a father, as a friend, an impersonal force, or in some other way? Describe how that relationship might impact your prayer life.
2. How does the fact that God is in heaven make you feel when you pray?
3. How do you balance the need for respect for God and His invitation to approach Him with boldness?
4. How has God revealed Himself to you as you have prayed? What has God shown you about Himself?

### **Section Three: Purpose**

**"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

The theme of this section is to discover the purpose of praying. The primary objective of prayer is to know His will and become aligned with it. The purpose is not to see our will done but His will. The purpose is not to get from God but to grow in God.

## **Chapter 7: God's Kingdom, His Will, and the Example of Jesus**

### ***What is God's kingdom?***

Jesus told us to pray: "Your kingdom come." God's kingdom is central to Jesus' teaching. In Matthew's gospel alone the Kingdom of God is mentioned more than fifty times. But what is God's kingdom? We cannot sincerely pray for God's kingdom to come until we begin to understand the concept. Before the fall in the Garden of Eden [Genesis 3], God's kingdom reigned on earth. The kingdom was characterized by God's reign in our hearts. But God's rule in our hearts was lost when Adam rebelled against God and ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Nevertheless, God told Adam that he had a plan to restore His kingdom. The kingdom would be established through those who placed their trust in the coming Messiah; the Messiah would crush the power of the evil one. This was accomplished when Jesus gave His life for us on the cross at Calvary. The Messiah's first coming ushered in a reign once again of God in the hearts of men. The Scriptures also tell of a second coming where God will establish the Messiah's literal everlasting Kingdom [Revelation 21:2-5; 22:3]. Essentially, we discover that it is characteristic of the subjects of His kingdom that they believe the King knows what is best for His subjects. Therefore, His subjects seek to know and do His will. Accordingly, we see the connection between His kingdom and His will being done.

### ***How is God's will done in heaven?***

We are to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. But we generally don't stop to consider, how is God's will done in heaven? What are some of the characteristics of God's will that we will see in heaven? When we get to heaven, we will clearly see the reality of God and His glory. God is revealed to man in heaven. In heaven, there is purity and perfection. Those in heaven worship God and trust Him completely. They are yielded to God as they submit to His rule. They live to please God. It is their primary desire to do His will.

### ***How is God's will done on earth?***

Preliminarily, we need to consider whether we want to see from God's view or whether we want to ask God to adopt our view. Our motive in prayer should be for us to desire to do things His way, not to get God to do things our way. Why is it difficult to do God's will? There is conflict between doing His will and our flesh, the devil, and our lust for the things of the world. In addition, there are difficulties created by failing to know God's will. Sometimes our failure is created by neglecting the Word of God. There are a multitude of occasions in the Bible where God clearly tells us His will. If we have neglected to learn the Word, we are unaware of His will. There are also many issues that arise in our lives where God has not specifically revealed His will in His Word, but we can discern His will through prayer. If we have no desire to discover His will, we are not doing His will. Another obstacle is the challenge to be obedient when doing God's will appears frightening, difficult, or likely to be unpleasant to us. Unfortunately, we often fail to be loyal subjects because we believe that our will is in our best interests rather than the

King's will. In the following discussion, we want to learn how to overcome these obstacles in prayer so that we may do the will of God on earth as it is in heaven.

### ***The example of Jesus***

Jesus came to do the will of the Father [Hebrews 10:7-9]. Jesus not only came to do the Father's will but to be an example for us so that we could learn to do the will of God on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus always does the will of the Father. Despite the tests, trials, and temptations that He experienced during His earthly ministry, He always did the Father's will and was thus without sin [Hebrews 4:15]. Yet we see the struggle in a human sense as the Lord sought to yield to the Father's will, especially in the Garden of Gethsemane: *"When He came to the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.' And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.'* Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" [Luke 22:40-44]. Jesus considers the impending cross and the weight of the sin of the world being thrust upon Him and understandably wants to avoid the suffering. Clearly, from Jesus' perspective, the concept of the spiritual suffering of taking on the sin of the world was a greater concern than the physical suffering connected with His crucifixion.

Luke records that Jesus' first words in the Garden were for the benefit of His disciples. He told them that prayer was the means of avoiding temptation. Temptations lure us to think or act contrary to God's will. There will always be temptations that will conflict with God's will; the path to victory is to follow the Master's footprints as set forth in the Garden. As Jesus prayed, we learn that He did not desire to undergo the suffering of the cross. Matthew tells us that Jesus became exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Jesus continued to pray: *"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will"* [Matthew 26:39]. The cup referred to Jesus' suffering in connection with the redemption of mankind at the cross. We learn in the Garden that there was no other way for mankind to be redeemed to God except through the perfect sacrifice of the Messiah upon the cross. But we also see the intense conflict between doing the will of God and our humanity, especially where we perceive suffering. This struggle is common to all of us.

As Jesus prayed, God sent an angel from heaven to strengthen Him. Similarly, God sends forth His Holy Spirit to strengthen the church [Romans 8:27]. Although He was strengthened, the conflict remained. Jesus continued to struggle in the Garden: *"And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* [Luke 2:44]. Jesus was agonizing like a wrestler fighting with every ounce of strength. As He fought to do the Father's will, His prayers became so intense that His sweat became like great drops of blood. The Lord's prayer in the Garden reveals that He sought to confirm the will of God and to be strengthened through prayer. He asked whether there was any way for the cup to pass. Although we have no record of a response from the Father, it is apparent that Jesus understood that God's will had been manifest. As Jesus continued to pray, He sought to do the

will of God. In this manner Jesus demonstrated that prayer is the means of discovering and doing the will of God despite the most difficult of circumstances. Prayer gives us the courage to endure the perfect but painful will of the Father.

## Chapter 8: The Benefits of Knowing God's Will and How to Know His Will

### *Benefits of knowing God's will*

Let us consider some of the benefits of knowing God's will that should motivate us:

#### **Closeness**

The first benefit of seeking to know God's will is that it draws us close to God. Simply repeating the words, "Your will be done" is an insult to God if I have not truly sought to discern His will. One of the many blessings of prayer is that we learn to hear from God in order to have intimate communication with Him. God wants us to know His will, but in the process, He wants us to seek Him. For example, imagine you have an offer of a new job. The position offers a promotion and a salary increase, and the prospective employer is a good company in your field. But, if you accept the job, it means leaving a position that you currently enjoy, moving to a new area, and leaving schools and a local church that have been blessings to your family. You are not sure what God wants you to do, so you pray for a minute or two, and ask God to reveal His will. You do this for three days in a row and still no answer. You're somewhat surprised because each time you prayed, you ended your prayer by saying, "Your will be done."

After the third day, you decide that you need a sign. So you conclude that if the prospective employer offers you a company car as part of your compensation package, it must be God's will. Two days pass, and they don't call to offer a company car, so you assume it must not be God's will, but you're confused. The next day, the company calls to see if you are interested in their job offer. You tell them that you want a company car in your compensation package, and they agree. You immediately assume it must be God's will and accept the position.

Unfortunately, you missed an opportunity to truly draw close to God and seek Him so that you could know His will. Instead, a sign was sought, and you are left without a true sense of confidence that you have heard from God.

#### **Confidence and Comfort**

A great blessing of the Christian life is the fact that we can actually know God's will, and then have confidence that we have heard from God. What a comfort it is to know that you are living in God's will, especially when your circumstances appear difficult.

For example, imagine a couple in a relationship. They are becoming serious about their commitment to one another and are thinking about marriage. They truly seek to hear from God to know His will for their relationship. After much prayer, they are both convinced that God is truly bringing them together to be husband and wife. He proposes; she accepts, and they plan to be married in a year. During their engagement, they have a horrible fight, what I refer to as "intense fellowship." They begin to think, "Maybe I shouldn't marry you after all." But then they recall that they truly sought God's will about their relationship and they know that they are



supposed to be married. Knowing it is His will for them to be together, they reconcile and move forward in their relationship with confidence and comfort.

## **Certainty**

God wants to assure us that if we ask anything according to His will, we can know that we will get what we ask; and we can know even before we receive that God will grant our request. God encourages us to pray by promising us that He will grant requests per His will: *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him"* [1 John 5:14-15]. God's promise is to believers. When John refers to "we," he is speaking to Christians. We can be certain that our prayers per His will are heard by God, and He will respond by granting our request. John assures us that because of who God is, we can know that our requests shall be granted. The fact that we can know confirms that we don't have to doubt, wonder, or be confused. Rather we can be certain. Our God would not provide this promise to tease and disappoint us. To the contrary, it is one of the great promises of the Word of God that we can know for certain our prayers will be granted.

In summary, we have considered three benefits to knowing His will: draw close to God, receive comfort and confidence, and be certain that God will grant our prayer requests. These benefits should stir us to learn how to know His will.

## ***How to know God's will***

### **Scripture**

The primary way that God wants to reveal His will to us is through His Word. The Word of God reveals the heart and mind of God in a general sense as well as in very specific ways. For example, Jesus encouraged the disciples in the Upper Room, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another"* [John 13:34]. In a general sense we understand that it is the will of God that we love one another. This is a general provision. But Jesus instructed us to not merely love one another, but to love as He loves. Accordingly, His will becomes more defined, but is still somewhat general. We may still wonder, "How does Jesus love?" The Word of God provides more specific instruction about loving others as follows: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you"* [Matthew 5:43-44]. Here we learn that we are to love our enemies, and our love is to be characterized by blessing, doing good acts towards them, and praying for them. Therefore, we see God's specific will revealed regarding demonstrating Jesus' love to our enemies.

We also recognize from this example that God's will may be contrary to the way that the natural man might think. For example, the natural man, or one who does not know Christ, might consider loving his neighbor but is extremely unlikely to love his enemy. We discover that

the Word of God transforms us: *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* [Romans 12:2].

The Word of God transforms us by renewing our minds and revealing God's will to us. Essentially, the Word of God reveals the will of God, and the will of God may be very different from the way the world thinks.

George Mueller did not pray merely because he felt a need for something. But when Mueller felt a burden to pray, he searched the Scriptures to determine if there was a promise from God regarding the issue. When he located the promise, he prayed with his Bible open and requested the promise from God. Mueller was certain that God would grant his prayer requests because God had manifested His will clearly in His Word and the requests were consistent with God's will. Accordingly, the more familiar we are with God's Word, the clearer His will is to us. The clearer His will is to us, the more confident we become that He will respond to our prayers.

But what about the problem where God's will may not be clear? Sometimes, when we consider issues in our lives, God's will appears to be more gray than black and white. For example, it can be difficult to determine God's will about: a job offer, a place to live, where to go to church, or whether a parent should work or stay home with kids. God has promised that He wants to make His will manifest to us if we will seek Him: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" [James 1:5]. When we pray to determine His will, God has promised to grant us godly wisdom to discern what He would have us do in the situations that we face. How does God impart that wisdom to us so that we can know His will? This brings us to our next key to unlock any mystery concerning God's will... the Holy Spirit.

## **Spirit**

The Spirit's help in prayer is mentioned in the Bible more frequently than any other help He gives us. We are to pray in the realm of the Spirit rather than merely our intellect. Real prayer moves in the supernatural realm of the Spirit. Such prayer transacts its business in the heavenly realm. The Holy Spirit intercedes to help us pray per God's will by guiding us in our prayers: "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" [Romans 8:26-27].

We pray to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" [Jude 1:20-21]. Paul also instructs us not only to have a lifestyle of prayer but to pray in the Spirit: *"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"* [Ephesians 6:18]. How do we pray in the Spirit? The Holy Spirit

guides us to pray just as Jesus would [John 14:15-17, 26]. In order to allow Him to guide us, we want to be filled with the Spirit: *"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit"* [Ephesians 5:18]. Being filled with the Spirit is not really about how much of the Holy Spirit we have, but it is about how much of us the Holy Spirit has. Being filled with the Holy Spirit relates to being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

When we yield our lives to God, His Spirit will guide our lives generally and specifically when we pray. For example, you might have a friend who prays for her unsaved family members seemingly all the time, but you don't feel led to pray for your unsaved family members. Perhaps the Spirit is leading your friend to pray for her family members but has not led you to pray for yours'. You have probably also discovered that in a group of people praying, many different requests are expressed as the Spirit leads.

Another way the Spirit will lead is with no words at all but merely groanings [Romans 8:26]. Imagine that you are praying for a loved one who is elderly and suffering with poor health and is currently in an intensive care unit at the hospital. You think that it might be best for her to go home to be with Jesus and never have to suffer again. But you also think it would be great for the Lord to heal her so that she can continue to be used by God on this earth. You're not really sure what God's will is. As you pray, you feel this welling up inside and just start to groan. It is likely the Spirit guiding your prayers per God's will.

The Spirit can also guide our prayers through the gift of tongues [1 Corinthians 12-14]. The gift of tongues is the imparting of an ability to pray to God or praise Him in a language that is unknown to the speaker. The language may be known to others [i.e. a known language of the world] or may be known only to God [i.e. a heavenly language]. Not all believers have the gift of tongues. When we pray using the gift of tongues, we know that we are praying in a manner consistent with God's will since it is the Spirit who is directing our prayers. When we don't know how to pray, we should ask God to direct our prayers, and trust that He will guide us. We can depend on God to direct and guide us to His will.

## **Separation**

Sometimes we fail to discern His will because we have failed to separate ourselves from the world. We discover the need to separate ourselves unto God in order to be able to learn His will: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* [Romans 12:1-2].

We are called to separate ourselves to God, or to be holy. This is a reasonable response to all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Reasonable service can be translated "spiritual worship." We offer our yielded lives to God as a sacrifice and as worship. We also need to avoid letting the world around us squeeze us into its own mold. We are either going to get our cues from the world or the Word. When we consider the concept of separation, we contemplate

simply establishing enough distance to learn to think the way that God thinks. I am not suggesting that we isolate ourselves from people. When we are separated, we can experience God's revelation of His will in our lives.

It is difficult to hear from God when there is too much distracting noise competing with the Father's "still small voice." We need to establish a degree of separation from our busy lives in order to hear God. We need to find time away from work, school, television, movies, and even ministry. Essentially, we need quiet time with God in prayer and study of his Word to hear from Him. The more time we spend, the closer to God we are likely to become.

## Chapter 9: Examples of God's Will and Purpose

In this chapter we will consider some of the many examples of His will and purpose that are related to prayer and described in the Scriptures.

### ***Pray to perceive spiritual truth***

Perception involves our ability to see. Sometimes our ability to perceive is limited by blinding distractions. One day I ran into a screen door I did not see due to the sun shining in from behind. In the spiritual realm, we can be blinded by the physical realm so that we do not see. Try to imagine how different our lives would be if we saw angels ministering to us, Jesus with us, the Holy Spirit in us, and the Father around us. As we begin to perceive spiritual truth, we live differently in the physical world.

The Syrian army had surrounded the prophet Elisha and his servant. The servant saw the army and was panicked. Elisha did not panic, for he perceived something to which the servant was oblivious. So Elisha prayed for perception: "*LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.*" Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" [2 Kings 6:17]. The man of God realized that the key to his servant's peace was the ability to perceive the army of God that was surrounding and protecting them. Since Elisha prayed for God to open the young man's eyes, God gave the servant proper perception.

Daniel and his three friends sought to discover the king's dream and determine its meaning, to demonstrate that the God of heaven was the True God. They prayed for God's mercy and the revelation of the secret, and the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Daniel had discovered that the key to perceiving spiritual truth was to be a man of prayer.

Similarly, the Apostle Paul prayed for us to perceive spiritual truth: "*Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened...*" [Ephesians 1:15-21; see also Ephesians 3:14-21; Colossians 1:9-12]. It is God's will to reveal Himself to us, and he delights to reveal Himself in response to our prayers for perception.

Sometimes we are unaware of our need for perception. For example, I used to think that I had good vision until one day I realized that I was having a problem seeing fastballs while playing baseball. I discovered that I needed glasses. I was amazed at the blessing that a new pair of glasses and what a new perspective could bring. Similarly, when I'm praying, God will often help me see a new perspective, even when I was unaware of the need. When God reminds me that it is not about what I can do for Him, but what He has done for me, it is a blessing to have His perspective. In prayer, I am blessed that God will change my perception.

## ***Persist in prayer***

When God delays a response, it does not reflect as much on the character of the one being asked as on the character of the person asking. Why doesn't God answer the first time we ask? Perhaps the delay is intended to develop persistence in prayer and spiritual maturity. Jesus told a parable about the need for persistence in prayer: "And He said to them, 'Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, *"Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him"*; and he will answer from within and say, *"Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you?"* I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs'" [Luke 11:5-8]. The disciples had just asked the Lord to teach them to pray, and he responded with the Model Prayer. Jesus then immediately taught the need to be persistent in prayer. In other words, the parable about persistence is part of the lesson about how to pray. The theme of the parable is that a man goes to his neighbor in the middle of the night to borrow bread. The friend declines because he is already in bed. Yet when the man persists in his request, the friend ultimately gives him as much bread as he wants. The application of this principle to our God is even more encouraging. Our God is never a bad neighbor; He never sleeps, and He always does good things. So we can be encouraged that He wants to respond to our requests, but He wants us to grow by persistent prayer.

Jesus emphasized this principle in a second parable to them that men always ought to pray and not lose heart. The principle is that the persistent widow in the parable is granted the relief she requests from the unjust judge because she persists [Luke 18:1-8]. Again we are encouraged that our God is not like the unjust judge. He is a righteous and merciful God. We can expect Him to respond to our persistent requests. The key is that we should always pray and not lose heart.

It is one thing to cry to God and another to hear Him and give Him time to respond. Persistence teaches us patience. In a culture characterized by impatience, microwaves, fast food, email, fax, and express lines, it is good to learn patience and character through persistent prayer. God's delay may simply be to develop our character rather than reflecting upon His intent to answer.

The prayers of Moses recorded in the Word may be short, but Moses prayed to God with fasting and mighty crying forty days and forty nights. Similarly, Paul's recorded prayers are short, but Paul prayed night and day exceedingly and instructed the Church to do likewise: *"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving"* [Colossians 4:12 ]; *"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"* [Ephesians 6:18]. C.H. Spurgeon observed, "If the ships of prayer do not come home speedily, it is because they are more heavily freighted with blessings.

How long should we pray? Moses prayed repeatedly for God to allow Him to enter the Promised Land. Finally, God told Moses to stop asking [Deuteronomy 3]. The moral of the story is: we should continue to pray until we perceive that God has said, "No."

### ***Pray for God to do the impossible***

One of the purposes of prayer is to help men to realize what is impossible for men, is possible with God. Jesus taught his disciples that those who asked God with confidence would move mountains: *"So Jesus answered and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, be removed and be cast into the sea it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive'"* [Matthew 21:21-22]. God will help us to overcome obstacles that are humanly impossible to demonstrate His glory.

I heard about a church that was near the end of a building project. The buildings had been completed but the parking lot had yet to be finished. The parking lot had a hill of dirt that had to be cleared so the area could be graded to finish the lot. The problem was that due to the enormous amount of dirt and the cost to haul it away, the church lacked the funds to complete the job. So the pastor addressed the congregation and told them the problem; then he said, "If anyone believes that God still moves mountains in response to prayer, come to a prayer meeting tonight." A group started to pray and asked God to move the mountain and provide resources to complete the parking lot.

The next day the pastor received a phone call from someone claiming to be associated with the local phone company. The phone company was also in a building project but they needed fill dirt for their grading. The phone company representative inquired whether the church would be willing to sell some of the dirt from the hill because it was one of only a few potential sources of dirt in the area and was the closest to the phone company construction project. At first the pastor thought it was one of his friends playing a practical joke, but then he realized it was God responding very literally to their prayer to move mountains. The pastor then explained about the church construction and the church's prayer to move mountains. The phone company then offered to remove all of the dirt and pay for it. The funds paid for the dirt made it possible for the church to complete the building project and begin to worship God in their new home. God still moves mountains literally and figuratively in response to our prayers.

### ***Pray for God to mobilize Christian workers***

Another express purpose of prayer is for God to send forth laborers to His harvest. Jesus came and taught about the kingdom of God and brought healing to people. He sought to see people restored of their spiritual, physical, and emotional needs. He looked and saw there were so many in need of restoration, and He felt their pain: *"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest'"* [Matthew 9:36-38].

Jesus was moved with compassion for the people and sought to minister to their needs. The people were like a harvest of ripe fruit waiting for the harvesters to come. Without pickers, the

fruit would fall to the ground and be trampled or would simply rot away. Interestingly, Jesus did not tell His disciples to go into the fields and begin to pick the fruit of the harvest. But instead, the Master told us to pray that the Lord of the Harvest would send out laborers into His harvest. Assuredly, as the disciples began to pray for God to send forth His pickers into the harvest, they realized that they in fact had been called by God to be some of the laborers. Furthermore, others perceived the call, responded, and went forth into the Lord's harvest.

Today there continue to be ripe fields and we need to continue to pray that God would send forth His laborers into His harvest. Before we plan evangelistic events and outreach, we need to pray for God to send laborers. It is His harvest, and He will be faithful to send forth laborers because He continues to have compassion for people. It appears that, as we develop compassion for His people, we not only want to pray for His harvest, but we desire to become pickers in the harvest.

### ***Pray for inspired plans***

Nehemiah was used by God to lead the rebuilding of the wall at Jerusalem. Nehemiah was a man with a plan. The people followed the vision and the wall was rebuilt. Nehemiah was a gifted administrator and leader, but there was more to the plan than Nehemiah's ability. In thirteen chapters Nehemiah describes the restoration of the city's walls and the people of the city. Ten times in the book he records his prayers. God wants us to know that prayer was the key to Nehemiah's receiving God's plan and was the way to establish the plan.

In the first chapter, Nehemiah heard the report of the great distress and reproach of the Hebrews as the city walls had been in ruins. He was moved with compassion and wept for his people. He then began to intercede and pray. For approximately four months, he prayed for the needs of the people of Jerusalem. He was diligent to seek God in prayer so that he could truly hear God speak. True vision is inspired by God and must be distinguished from the good ideas of men.

As Nehemiah prayed to God for the Hebrews, God poured His heart and mind into Nehemiah. God began to prepare, direct, and impart a vision for the rebuilding of the city's walls. After the passage of several months, it appeared to Nehemiah that God was calling him to lead the rebuilding of the city walls, but he wanted to make sure that it was God rather than his own vision. Nehemiah appreciated the value of prayer. When the Persian king asked about Nehemiah's concerns, Nehemiah prayed to God before responding to the king. Under the circumstances of Nehemiah standing in front of the king, his prayer was understandably brief, but it was honored by God. A quick prayer, like an arrow, can reach God if the person praying is close to God. Nehemiah wanted assurance that the plan was from God rather than his own ideas, so he likely prayed that God would demonstrate His will by "opening or closing the doors."

When the king asked what Nehemiah was seeking, Nehemiah responded by sharing the plan. He detailed his desire to rebuild the city, especially the wall. He was able to advise the king how



long the project was expected to last. He had an estimate of the materials he would need as well as the permits from the king to undertake the project. Nehemiah's response to the king made it evident that he had spent time seeking God and considering some of the details of the vision to formulate a plan. The king's response in granting his request further demonstrated that the source of the plan was God. In addition, the success of the project demonstrated that God was the source of the plan.

As you read the book of Nehemiah and consider the tremendous challenges that were faced throughout the project, it is essential to learn that Nehemiah continuously sought God in prayer to determine God's will. God continued to faithfully provide a plan. So Nehemiah was the man with the plan, but the plan was not his own. The plan was a gift from God to Nehemiah to bless His people and accomplish His will on earth as it is in heaven.

Similarly, we should ask God to reveal His inspired plans for our lives. As you pray, ask God to reveal His plans and purpose for your life generally and specifically.

### **Purpose Study Guide**

1. What are some of the purposes of prayer?
2. What are some of the benefits of knowing God's will?
3. How can you know God's will?
4. Consider a time in your life when you sought to be persistent in prayer. What did you learn about prayer, God, and yourself?

## **Section Four: Petition**

**"Give us this day our daily bread."**

In this section, we will consider the following themes regarding prayer and petition:

**why do we ask  
when do we ask  
what do we ask for  
how do we ask**

## Chapter 10: Why and When Do We Ask?

### *Why do we ask?*

Since God knows our need before we ask [Matthew 6:32], why do we even need to ask? The purpose of petitions is to help us learn to depend upon God. We communicate our perceived needs by personal requests and intercession for others.

We wrestle with the vexing questions: Why are some prayers answered and others not? Since prayer is a dialogue, why does God sometimes remain silent? C.S. Lewis, the 20th-century British author and Christian apologist, once wrote that prayer “is either a sheer illusion or a personal contact between embryonic, incomplete persons (ourselves) and the utterly concrete Person.” More important to Lewis than how God answers prayer was the realization that “in [prayer] God shows Himself to us.”

George Mueller determined that the purpose of His life was to demonstrate to all men that to rest solely on the promise of a faithful God is the only way to know for one’s self and to prove to others His faithfulness. Mueller learned to refuse to communicate the needs of the orphanages, and instead, he relied upon God to provide. Even when people inquired regarding the financial needs, Mr. Mueller declined and responded, “I feel not at liberty to speak about the state of our funds as the primary object of the work of my hands is to lead those who are weak in the faith, to see that there is reality in dealing with God alone.” Mr. Mueller then prayed, “Lord, you know that for Your sake, I did not tell this brother about our need. Now, Lord, show afresh that there is reality in speaking to You only about our need.”

The person who believes in God expects God to respond and is not surprised at answers to prayer. Mueller describes in his journal an occasion in 1840 when he had been waiting on God for deliverance. Help had been so long delayed that in one of the houses there was no bread, and none of them had any milk nor money with which to buy either item. Only a few minutes before the milkman’s cart was due, money came for the provisions.

When God lays a burden on our hearts and thus keeps us praying, He obviously intends to grant the answer. Mr. Mueller was asked if he really believed that two men would be converted, men for whom he had prayed for over fifty years. Mueller replied: “Do you think God would have kept me praying all these years if He did not intend to save them?” In fact both men were converted, one shortly after Mueller’s death.

From a natural view, prayer is ridiculous. It is absurd to believe that we and our circumstances will be altered by prayer. But that is what Jesus promised. Unfortunately, we are generally not wise enough or trusting enough to believe Him and depend upon God. We present our petitions not to convince God but to convince ourselves. In proving to Him that by His own word and character, He has bound Himself to intercede, we demonstrate to ourselves that He has called us to ask, and He will answer our requests because He cannot deny Himself.

We are to approach the Father as children. As children, we learn that we can depend upon our Father. We express perceived needs with the confidence that He loves us and desires to respond. We should not think of ourselves as beggars or spiritual customers but as children the Father adores. We need not approach God as spoiled children with broken toys tossing them upon the floor and demanding new toys. Instead, we need to come to our Father with our broken toys to lay them at His feet. Then we learn to wait upon Him to determine how He might choose to repair, restore, or replace.

Yet despite the desire to patiently wait, there is a sense of urgency. We ask God to respond *this day*. When we pray “Give us this day...,” the Greek tense indicates a request seeking an urgent response. There is a tension between our perceived need and God’s time schedule. It is comforting to know that God is never late. However, He is rarely early. As we ask, and while we wait, we learn to depend on God. Simply stated, we ask so that we can learn to depend upon God. When we decline to pray, in effect, we are declaring that we can take care of our needs without God. When we believe that we can live without God’s help, it is a dangerous condition. It is far better to pray as if all depends upon God, and work as if all depends upon us.

### ***When do we ask?***

Our petition to “Give us this day our *daily* bread...” speaks of developing a daily dependence upon God. Luke records an account of Jesus’ instruction on prayer with a slightly different emphasis: “Give us *day by day* our daily bread.” First century workers were paid one day at a time and were in a precarious situation. Their wages provided only for their needs rather than “their greeds.” If they became unable to work for only a few days, their well-being was truly threatened. Accordingly, a sense of daily dependence was a familiar concept. Unfortunately, in our culture it may be too easy for us to develop a sense of self-sufficiency as a result of our savings or the availability of credit.

God desires us to be blessed, and He desires a daily relationship with us. I learned this lesson in an interesting way. One night, a group of my guy friends and I took our young kids to our local pizza parlor and amusement center. The place is filled with games and activities for the kids all available to be played in exchange for a king’s ransom worth of tokens. The pizza is nothing less than mediocre, and the ambiance is like being in the middle of a pinball game with lots of noise, whirling lights, and careening activity. My friends and I made the mistake of depositing the entire treasure of tokens into the hands of the little ones. They went out and played the games with little incentive to come back to see their dads. When the pizza finally arrived we tried to gather up the kids . It was like herding cats as they had spread throughout the amusement area. Later that night, I told my wife about the adventure and she shared a great insight I wished I had heard a few hours earlier. The key is to give the kids only a few tokens at a time so that they keep coming back. That way, you make sure the kids are okay, and the kids stay connected to you.

God wants me to come to Him day by day to minister to my needs and to learn that I can and need to depend upon Him. It is far better for me to keep coming back to my Father regularly for

more tokens than for Him to grant me all the tokens at once. If I don't come to God daily to be filled and to receive from Him, I am going to become empty before I am even likely to become aware of the problem. A train needs fuel to move down the tracks, but once the train has been running down the tracks there is tremendous momentum that will keep the train moving. The train will keep moving despite the fact that it has run out of fuel. Furthermore, it will be many miles before the slowing of the train even becomes perceptible. But the train slows and will grind to a halt without fuel.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to get the train moving and to once again build the momentum. It is far better for me to keep coming to God on a daily basis and remain full. As I pray to God daily, I receive a sense of confidence that God will respond to my petitions and provide for my needs. Also, I feel a sense of satisfaction and spiritual enrichment that sustains.

God sought to teach this principle to the Hebrews when they dwelt in the wilderness for forty years. God miraculously provided food called manna until the Hebrews entered the Promised Land and they were able to partake of the produce of the land. Manna was a small, round substance as fine as frost that tasted like wafers made with honey. The people wondered, "What is it?" This question asked by the curious Israelites led to the name "manna", meaning "What is it?" The manna appeared with the morning dew. The people were instructed to gather only what was needed for one day. If the Hebrews tried to gather more than a one-day supply, the surplus would breed tiny worms and be spoiled. On the sixth day the Hebrews were permitted to gather enough for two days since they could not work to gather manna on the Sabbath. Miraculously, the two days' supply of food gathered on the sixth day did not spoil. Manna was a tangible reminder to the people of their dependence upon God for provision and God's faithfulness. Moses gave instruction for a pot of manna to be placed in the Ark of the Covenant so future generations might see the "bread of heaven" on which their ancestors fed.

Jesus taught that He was the true bread of life which we need [John 6:22-35]. He contrasted the manna, which merely sustained life, and Himself, the giver of life. Manna provided for an important physical need, but it also pointed to Jesus, who provided for a greater spiritual need. We need to approach Jesus daily through prayer to be spiritually satisfied and full, just like the Hebrews had to gather manna daily to satisfy their physical needs.

I've discovered that I like to eat food frequently throughout the day. I become uncomfortable if I go long periods without food. Absent special circumstances, I would not think of going a few days or longer without food. Similarly, if I don't spend time speaking with God daily, and making my petitions to Him, I'm going to become uncomfortable. Yet, if I approach Jesus daily in prayer I will feel spiritually full.

## Chapter 11: What Do We Ask For?

Jesus instructed us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." In the immediate context, Jesus was likely referring to physical needs satisfied by the coarse barley loaves that were the primary food source of the multitudes of poor. Nevertheless, it is good to consider some of the ways the term "bread" is used in the Scriptures to better understand that Jesus is also likely referring to our spiritual, as well as our physical, needs.

When Jesus was tested in the wilderness for forty days and nights, He fasted and was hungry. The devil urged Jesus to turn the stones to bread to satisfy His hunger. Jesus resisted the temptation and responded: "*It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'*" [Matthew 4:4] Jesus' response is recorded for our benefit so we may learn that our spiritual feeding from the Word of God is as essential to life as our physical feeding from a loaf of bread. We need our spirit fed every day with the Word of God.

Similarly, Jesus made a connection between bread and ministering to our physical and spiritual needs in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus had just miraculously fed five thousand people. The people followed after Jesus. They had seen Him perform a mighty miracle, and they should have followed because they realized that He was their Messiah. Unfortunately, they followed because they were most interested in satisfying a physical hunger. Jesus urged them not to focus on physical food but to seek the spiritual food that brings forth everlasting life. Then Jesus revealed Himself as the bread of God which came down from heaven and gives life. Jesus contrasted the loaves of physical bread, and even the manna which God miraculously provided, with Himself. The former only sustained life, whereas Jesus imparts life. We must partake of Jesus day by day to enjoy the fullness of life He desires to impart to us.

Jesus also applied spiritual significance to bread during the Last Supper when He instituted the Lord's Supper or communion: "*And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me'*" [Luke 22:19] Here Jesus was urging the disciples to receive strength for the Christian life that is available only through Jesus. The strength is appropriated by an intimate relationship with Jesus or communion. When we partake of the elements, the bread and the cup, it is a tangible reminder of God's love for us. As we remember His love, we desire to draw close to Him and we receive His provision and enabling power.

Therefore, we see that when we pray for God to give us daily bread, we are asking Him to provide for our physical and spiritual needs day by day. Our petitions should contemplate a desire to receive from God not only for our physical needs but to truly seek Him and receive sustenance for our spiritual needs. Christians have a conflict between their fleshly nature and their spiritual nature. The fruit of the Spirit is described as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control [Galatians 5:22-23]. Our fleshly nature is characterized by opposition to God. Whichever nature I feed more is likely to dominate.

For example, we have physical needs for food, exercise, air, and rest. We have similar spiritual needs. We feed our spirit with the Word of God and prayer, and we feel spiritually satisfied as we learn more about God. In the physical realm, if we exercise, the results will be obvious increased strength and endurance. Similarly, in the spiritual life if we are diligent to pray and read the Word, the transformation will be obvious. We need air to sustain physical life. Even though we don't see the oxygen, we accept in confidence that as we inhale we are satisfying a need. In the same way we can be confident that we will be satisfied even though we don't see the Spirit. In the physical realm, we see the effect of the air as the wind moves the leaves on the trees. The effect of the Spirit is just as tangible.

Finally, our bodies need rest. We need sleep each day to function properly. Our spiritual rest is obtained by peace with God. We obtain peace with God by inviting Jesus into our lives. Then, we obtain peace from God as we learn from Jesus about how to live the Christian life.

If you find yourself struggling to read the Bible or hear from God, begin by praying and asking God for help. Also, consider some practical ideas such as a study Bible, a modern translation, and asking questions to a spiritually mature friend or pastor.

As we present our petitions to God, it is comforting to know that He cares about all of our needs and concerns. Peter wrote to the Church during a time of persecution and hardship and reminded them of God's concern: "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" [1 Peter 5:7]. It is not because we are fatalistic that we cast our cares upon Him. We cast our cares because He cares for us. Furthermore, we cast all of our cares. There is no problem that we have today that is too big for God. We don't have any reason to panic because our God is big enough to deal with it, and He cares. What sometimes is more difficult to grasp is that we can bring the small stuff to Him as well because He cares. For example, if I'm praying for God to heal someone suffering from cancer I think of that as a "big one." But I know it's not too big for God and He cares so I make my petition. On the other hand, when I have a cold I almost feel like not praying for healing because I don't want to bother God with the small stuff. I've learned that God is not too busy to handle the small stuff. It's not an extra burden to Him.

When children cry out to their parents, their needs may seem relatively small or unimportant to the parent, but the parent cares because the request is big to the child. Similarly, when we make our petitions to God, He cares because they are important to us. God cares about the big stuff, the small stuff, and all the stuff in between.

We see an example of this principle in the life of the prophet Elisha. God demonstrated His love for us by working miracles through Elisha to minister to the relatively big and the small needs. When a woman's only son died, the prophet prayed to God and the boy's life was restored [2 Kings 4]. I think we can all agree that is a "big one." Later, some of the ministry students were expanding their "campus" and were cutting down trees near the Jordan River. One of the students had borrowed an ax and was cutting down the trees when the iron ax head came off the handle and sank to the bottom of the river. A lost ax head is certainly not a big need like raising a child from the dead. But it was still a problem. There were no hardware stores on



every corner and iron tools were relatively rare and expensive. Also, the student had borrowed the ax and presumably had no way to replace the ax. Again, God came through as the man of God was used to miraculously minister to the situation. Elisha cut off a stick and threw it into the water where the ax head had sunk. Then the iron ax head miraculously floated to the top of the river to be retrieved.

One day I learned this principle in a very special way. I have a sixty year old mechanical watch that used to be my father's. All I have to do is wind the crown of the watch, and it keeps time. One day I looked at the watch to wind it, and the crown had fallen off. My heart sank as this watch is very precious to me, and the crown could have been lost almost anywhere. Trying to find something that small is like the proverbial needle in the haystack. I prayed to God, "Lord, you know where that watch crown is, and I just ask you to show me for Your glory." Moments later, I looked down at the carpet, and there it was. Interestingly, my wife was just about to vacuum that room, and the crown could have been lost forever. God wanted to demonstrate that He cares about the small stuff; therefore, how much more should I trust Him with the big stuff that He knows is of even greater concern to me.

As we consider our petitions, we can be comforted by Paul's encouraging reminder to the Philippian church: "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" [Philippians 4:19]. Another translation states that God will fulfill our needs. This implies that God wants to fill us full. We need to know that God will minister to our needs. We learn this from the comfort and hope of the Scriptures and the testimony of the experience of God's faithfulness.

I remember that when our church began our resources seemed particularly limited. After a month of Sundays, we needed one thousand dollars to pay the rent. It was Sunday afternoon, and I was praying: "God what am I going to do? I don't know what to do. Help!" I did not want to ask anyone for money, and I had no idea how we were going to pay the rent. The next day, I went to the mail box and there was a check, from someone named John Jones who lived in another city far away, in the sum of one thousand one hundred dollars. The amount of the check was exactly the amount we needed plus ten percent. The person who sent the check had no idea of the need nor had anyone else been told. But God had provided for the need as well as providing beyond the need to demonstrate His faithful response to our petitions.

A few years later, the pastors of the church were praying about expanding our facilities. The church was still very young, and the step of faith was approached prudently as we wanted to be sure it was God's will as the church did not apparently have resources sufficient for the expansion. One night, shortly before our midweek Bible study, I received a phone call from a man named John, who said he had visited our church on the preceding Sunday visiting family in our city. He lived out of state and would be leaving our area in a couple of days. He wanted to know if he could see me before the Bible Study. I generally try to avoid appointments before teaching, but I agreed to meet with him. When he arrived, I wanted to extend hospitality to him and be a good shepherd, but I also needed to get ready. After we talked for awhile I asked, "Is there anything else we can do for you?" He replied, "I didn't come for what you could do for

me." Then he handed me an envelope. I thanked him and placed the envelope in my Bible. He asked me to open the envelope, and I did. Inside was a check for fifteen thousand dollars. The name on the check was John Jones... the same name as the person who had sent the check a few years earlier. The second John Jones lived in a state in the Midwest, but I asked him whether he had ever lived in the area where the first John Jones had lived. He responded that he had not and asked me why I wanted to know. So I explained the testimony of what happened a few years earlier. The second John Jones simply told me that God had moved his heart to support our ministry and then he left... and I haven't seen him since.

Through these experiences and the Word of God, I have learned that God cares about my needs, and He will provide. It does not matter if the need is a hundred dollars, a thousand dollars, ten thousand dollars, or a million dollars. There is no concern I have today that is too big for my God. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and apparently has plenty of John Joneses to distribute His ample resources.

The best way to know what to ask for is to stay close to Jesus and discover His will by knowing Him and His Word. Jesus assured us that God would answer the prayers of people that are connected to Him and have allowed His Word to dwell in their hearts: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" [John 15:7]. As I stay close to Jesus and learn His heart by studying His Word, my prayer requests are transformed. Before I came to know Jesus, and perhaps even as a young Christian, I probably would have asked God for a convertible Jaguar. There is nothing wrong with a convertible Jaguar, but I know today that such a request would not be consistent with Jesus' plan for my life. As we stay close to Jesus and learn the Bible, we discover what is important to God. Our petitions are transformed to be consistent with His nature. When our petitions are consistent with who Jesus is, God delights to answer our requests [John 16:24].

A poll published in U.S. News & World Report in December of 2004 reveals some of our attitudes about why, how, where, and when people pray. Here is a summary of the more than 5,600 responses to the survey. 75percent of the people who responded are Christian. 64 percent say they pray more than once a day. 56 percent say that they most often pray for family members. 38 percent say that the most important purpose of prayer is intimacy with God. 74 percent say that when their prayers are not answered, the most important reason is because they did not fit into God's plan. 79 percent say that they pray most often at home.

Although it seems that we pray about nearly everything, the Scriptures reveal a multitude of petitions asking God to minister to both physical and spiritual needs. Let us consider ten of the many specific subjects of petition that we see presented to God:

### **The Holy Spirit**

*"If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" [Luke 11:11-13].*

**For a child**

*"So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, 'O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head'" [1 Samuel 1:9-13].*

**For a spouse**

*"Then he said, 'O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'—let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master" [Genesis 24:12-14].*

**Salvation**

*"Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom'" [Luke 23:42].*

**Healing**

*"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" [James 5:14-16].*

**Spiritual leaders**

*"Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains" [Colossians 4:3].*

**Political leaders**

*"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior" [1 Timothy 2:1-3].*

**Israel**

*"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you" [Psalm 122:6].*

**All men**

*"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, [and] giving of thanks be made for all men" [1 Timothy 2:1].*

**Jesus' return**

*"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" [Revelation 22:20]*

In conclusion, when we consider what we ask for, it is important to simply remember: we ask for what concerns us today.

## Chapter 12: How Do We Ask?

As we consider how to ask, we will focus on two key principles:

### **Crying out Confident**

#### ***Crying out***

Each of us realizes that there are times in our lives that our prayers lack passion. For example, I might pray before eating a meal and give thanks to God for the food He has provided. I am truly grateful, but the prayer lacks passion. On the other hand, there are times in my life when I have cried out to God with a passion that comes from deep within. If I can recognize the difference in my heart between the two types of petition, certainly God does as well.

One day Jesus came to a city and a certain blind man sat by the road, begging. When He discovered that Jesus was passing by, He cried out to Him for mercy. The people who had gathered told him to be quiet, but he cried out all the more for the Messiah to have mercy on him. This passionate cry of urgency and dependence did not offend Jesus. But based upon His response, He was apparently blessed. Jesus stopped and asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" The man asked to receive his sight, and the Lord restored his vision [Luke 18:35-43]. **It was not that Jesus sought to suppress the audible cry of his mouth but that Jesus sought to satisfy the passionate cry of his heart.**

Crying out is synonymous with fervent prayer. *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"* [James 5:16]. Fervent prayer is effective prayer, assuming you are right with God. But if prayer is not fervent, you have no reason to expect it to be effective. The Greek term translated prayer speaks of a definite expression of a deeply felt need. This passionate petition avails much. In Greek, the idea is that this type of cry has power or strength.

This type of prayer involves spiritual work: *"Epaphras, who is [one] of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God"* [Colossians 4:12]. Epaphras prayed fervently for the spiritual maturity of the Colossian church. He is described as laboring fervently.

When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He labored fervently. He was intensely focused on the spiritual battle at hand. He was in agony and prayed more earnestly. Praying fervently means to strive after, to give all diligence, and to make it one's aim. Our prayers often lack a fervent cry unto God and accordingly are ineffective. Fruitful prayer is fervent prayer that cries out to God.

When we petition God, our prayers should reflect passion that demonstrates our requests are truly important to us. The fervency may not be manifest with tears or a loud voice, but must reflect a heart that passionately seeks God's response to the petition.

## **Confident**

When we pray, we are to pray with confidence or faith. *"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive [them], and you will have [them]"* [Mark 11:24]. What is our confidence? Consider the blind man that Jesus encountered begging along the road to Jericho. He cried out to Jesus and twice referred to Him as, "Son of David." The blind man was ascribing a Messianic title upon Jesus. In other words, he acknowledged that Jesus was in fact the Messiah. When Jesus brought the man near, He asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" If we put ourselves in the situation, it appears fairly obvious that the man's greatest desire would be for Jesus to restore His sight. So why does Jesus ask? Especially when we consider that Jesus knew the desire of the blind man before He asked. The man had initially asked for mercy. But mercy could be demonstrated by providing money for this poor beggar who was unable to support himself. How confident was the man? Would he be willing to demonstrate his confidence in who Jesus is by asking Him to restore his sight? The blind man demonstrated that He was in fact completely confident that Jesus was the Messiah; He would want to minister to his need.

Our confidence is in who Jesus is. Because we understand that Jesus is the Messiah, and that He demonstrates the loving nature of God to us, we expect to get the very thing that we ask for. There is no need to doubt God when prayer is consistent with His will.

On one occasion, a Roman centurion, a commander of one hundred soldiers, came to Jesus to seek healing for his servant. Jesus offered to come to his home and heal the servant. The centurion answered and said, *"Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this [one], 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does [it]. When Jesus heard [it], He marveled, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!'"* [Matthew 8:5-10] The centurion was confident in who Jesus is. He understood that Jesus did not need to be physically present to heal the servant, but Jesus exercised full authority. Therefore, Jesus could heal the servant by merely choosing to do so. Jesus was impressed by his confidence and remarked, *"Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"* The centurion's unwavering confidence in Jesus' identity and nature impressed the Lord, and the Lord intervened.

God delights to respond to our petitions we present to Him with confidence that He is able and willing to respond to all of our requests consistent with His will. James expresses this principle as follows, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord..."* [James 1:5-7]. Faith and doubt cannot reside in man at the same time. When man believes, he does not doubt. And when he is in doubt, he lacks confidence. James illustrates his point with imagery of the waves at the nearby Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea, an image familiar to his audience. The sea is described as

essentially restless and unstable. So too James describes the man who doubts. He lacks the wisdom he desperately needs to give direction to his life. But because he lacks confidence, God may seem not to speak. God wants His people to come with confidence and then rewards them for doing so. On the other hand, God will not give divine insight to those who lack confidence. Therefore, it is essential to realize that the source of wisdom is God; it is obtained by prayer. It is available to everybody, given generously, and we need to ask in confidence.

### ***The example of Daniel***

The principles of crying out to God with confidence are demonstrated in the life of Daniel. Daniel was taken captive to Babylon as a teenager. He was taken captive as a future leader to become the leader of the future. He was a man of excellent spirit abundant in prayer since his early days.

Daniel was a man who experienced intimate communication with God. Even as a young man, Daniel was steadfast in his faith. God blessed Daniel with knowledge, wisdom, abilities as an administrator and leader, and understanding in all visions and dreams. When the Babylonian king had a troubling dream, he sought to discover the meaning of the dream. The king perceived the importance of the dream and told his counselors that he wanted to know the meaning of the dream but could not reveal the substance of the dream. The king's magicians, wisemen, and astrologers confessed that they were unable to help. But Daniel prayed to God to reveal the dream and its meaning. Daniel was confident that the True and Living God could and would reveal this secret. Then God mercifully revealed the mystery. God's response to Daniel's fervent prayer not only spared Daniel and helped to strengthen his faith, but was a testimony to the king. The king concluded: *"Truly your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets since you could reveal this secret"* [Daniel 2:47].

Daniel was a gifted and loyal administrator who was promoted to become one of three governors over the Empire. Other leaders were jealous and sought to bring a charge against Daniel, but they could find no charge or fault. They concluded that the only charge they could bring against him would concern the law of his God. So they plotted and tricked the king to sign a royal decree that no one in the kingdom could petition any god or man for thirty days except the king. The penalty was death as the violator would be cast into the den of lions. *"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God"* [Daniel 6:10-11]. Daniel knew that the decree had been signed, and his prayers to God would subject him to the death penalty. But Daniel remained fervent in His prayers and confident in God. He continued to pray with his windows open for all to see, three times a day as was his custom since his early days. He gave thanks and prayed to God. Daniel was not afraid to pray despite the decree. Daniel had learned that there is no reason to pray to God unless God truly is who He claims to be; if God is God, we can be confident that He can deliver us. Daniel's life of prayer and confidence in God even impressed the pagan king that Daniel's God would in fact deliver him. When God did in

fact deliver Daniel from the lion's den, the king issued a decree honoring the living God who delivers and rescues.

By studying the prophecies in the book of Jeremiah, Daniel realized that Israel's seventy years of captivity in Babylon were almost at an end. Daniel then set his face toward God and made request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. Daniel approached God with passion, humility, and remorse. He confessed his sins and the sins of his people as he petitioned the Lord to restore the Hebrews and to restore the city of Jerusalem. Daniel's petitions are based on the character of God. He reminds God of His mercy, greatness, awesomeness, faithfulness, righteousness, and forgiveness. But Daniel also implores God to intercede for God's own benefit [Daniel 9:17-19].

Essentially, Daniel urges that it is in God's best interest to restore. Daniel argues that these are God's interests because they are His people, sanctuary, city, and holy mountain. Daniel intercedes for his people with a fervency that must have delighted God. Not only does God grant the request for restoration, but He reveals the prophecy of the "seventy weeks," which is a foundation of Biblical prophecy. God wanted Daniel to know that He would in fact restore His people and the city of Jerusalem, and that He had a plan to accomplish the restoration. Daniel was not only trusted as steward to communicate the prophecy, but was given the prophecy to bring comfort in response to his prayers. While Daniel was praying, God sent Gabriel to reveal the prophecy and to tell Daniel that he was greatly beloved by God. Daniel had been confessing his sin and the sin of his people. But God was not angry with Daniel. God wanted Daniel to know that he was loved by God. God did not love Daniel merely because he prayed. But because he prayed, God was able to communicate that message to Daniel. Furthermore, because Daniel desired an intimate relationship with God, he was greatly beloved by God. Gabriel then gave the outline of the future history of the Jewish nation as revealed in the prophecy of the "seventy weeks."

Daniel continued to be a man of fervent prayer. In the winter of his life, after some of the captives had returned to Jerusalem, Daniel remained in exile. He had lived through the Babylonian empire and Israel's captivity. He saw the collapse of Babylon and the rise of the new empire of Cyrus, the Persian king. Daniel was in his mid to late eighties as he continued to serve as an administrator in the Persian Empire and continued to seek to intercede for God's people.

On one occasion, Daniel had been earnestly seeking God for three weeks. He ate no pleasant food; no meat or wine came into his mouth, nor did he anoint himself [Daniel 10:1-3]. Daniel sought to separate himself from the comfort of this world to separate himself unto God. Daniel persevered in pursuing a passionate petition. Why was Daniel so burdened? Perhaps Daniel received discouraging news about the status of the efforts to rebuild the Temple, or was it his desire to know the future of his people, or perhaps it was a general concern for the spiritual condition of God's people. These appear to be some of the primary reasons why Daniel was petitioning God as seen from God's response.



As Daniel prayed, he saw a vision of a messenger similar in appearance to the description of Jesus in His glory as described in Revelation 1:13-16. Daniel records that he alone saw the vision, for the men who were with him did not see the vision [Daniel 10:7]. Why was Daniel the only one to see the vision? If Daniel was the only one who was truly passionately seeking God, it should not be surprising that he was the only one to whom God revealed Himself. This is the greatest response that any of us could receive to our petition to know that we have heard from God and that we understand Him more intimately than we had.

As Daniel prays, he receives a comforting touch as well as comforting words. Daniel is encouraged that there is no need to fear, that he is greatly beloved of God, and that he is called to understand the future of God's people. Then the messenger says to Daniel, *"Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words"* [Daniel 10:12]. How comforting it is for us to know that when we humbly seek God and desire understanding of His ways, He hears. The messenger has come in response to Daniel's prayer. Daniel had a burden upon his heart as he was approaching the end of his life to know what would become of his people [the Jews]. God wants to comfort Daniel so He sends a message to assure him that He loves His people [the Jews] and has a plan for them.

Daniel is then informed why there was a delay between his prayers and God's response: *"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia"* [Daniel 10:13]. The response was delayed for three weeks as a result of the opposition from the prince of Persia. Since Michael the archangel came to assist, we can discern that this opposition involved an evil angelic power, one stronger than a mere human "prince."

We must realize there is a spiritual battle, God's forces prevail, and our prayers are an integral weapon in this battle [see Ephesians 6:11-18]. The comfort flows from knowing that God hears our prayers and wants us to have understanding and victory.

Therefore, as we consider the life of Daniel, we see a man who was confident that His God would respond to his prayers and a man who cried out to God with passion. More importantly, we see that God responded to Daniel's petitions with comforting words and a revelation of God's plan and nature. God knows our daily needs and will not neglect his children. As we pray with passion, He will respond, comfort us, and reveal Himself to us.

### **Petition Study Guide**

1. How can prayer help use learn to depend upon God?
2. Why should be pray daily?
3. What should we be asking God for?
4. How should we ask God?

## **Section Five: Preparation**

**"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."**

In this section we consider the following themes regarding prayer and preparation:

**preparation to confess  
preparation to forgive  
the cycle of preparation**

## Chapter 13: Preparation to Confess

### **Character**

Holy character is formed by the experience and preparation of prayer. John Wesley observed: "The neglect of prayer is a grand hindrance to holiness." God uses prayer to change us. So many of our prayers reflect our selfishness, rather than a desire to allow God to prepare us so that the work of God can be accomplished in our lives and then, through our lives, to impact the lives of others. We see these principles revealed in the life of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, as described in the beginning of the first book of Samuel. Hannah had been barren for years. In that culture, it was a great stigma to be barren. Many people wrongly assumed that the failure to bear children was a sign of God's judgment or disapproval. Hannah's shame was compounded by the fact that her husband had another wife with many children.

One day, as Hannah journeyed to the Tabernacle to worship God, her husband asked why she was sad. Hannah was grieved that she had not been blessed with a child and despite her husband's love and affection, she was sorrowful. Year after year she had gone to the house of the Lord and presumably prayed for a son; yet each year she remained barren and faced the ridicule of others. Each year she wrestled with her jealousy, envy, and bitterness. Perhaps she had even become angry at God and was ready to give up. She was so upset that she could barely eat, and she continually wept in anguish. But God had not neglected Hannah. Hannah's name means "grace," and God was preparing Hannah to demonstrate His grace.

As Hannah came to the house of the Lord, she prayed passionately to God as she wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, *"O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life"* [1 Samuel 1:11].

Hannah's vow was not a rash reaction of her emotions but was the product of many seasons of wrestling with God in prayer which produced godly character. Hannah had been praying for a son for many years to fulfill her own joy and desire to remove the shame and ridicule that she experienced. There was nothing wrong with Hannah's desire for a son but it fell short of God's purpose. When Hannah was prepared to pray, "Lord, give me a son and I'll give him back to you all the days of his life" Hannah had become aligned with God's purpose and will. God wanted to give Hannah a son all the while, but He delayed the answer to her prayers, until her character was developed to be in harmony with God's heart. God had a plan for Hannah's son. The Hebrews had become so corrupt that there was no true godly leader to redirect the people back to God. God used Hannah's son, Samuel, as a prophet, priest, and one of the most outstanding leaders of the Old Testament.

Hannah is a remarkable example of a person of prayer. Her passionate prayers are seen in contrast to the general spiritual lethargy of her people and her culture. The Hebrews had been entrusted with many blessings from God but the greatest was a relationship with Him. Yet the

relationship was neglected. People came to the Tabernacle and offered ritual sacrifices and priests performed their functions. But God was not truly worshiped and lives were not truly transformed. As Hannah fervently prayed to God, her emotions flowed forth as her heart was poured out to God. As she spoke in her heart to God, her lips moved, but she was silent. The high priest who observed her prayers assumed that she was drunk because her lips were moving but she was silent. In other words, the priest had become so accustomed to people simply reciting prayers with no emotion or passion that when he observed fervent prayer he presumed that it was a wrong behavior. Hannah explained that she had not been drinking, but in her grief she had cried out to God to give her a son. To his credit, the high priest quickly realized his error and encouraged Hannah that God had heard her prayers and that she could go in peace. So Hannah departed and she was no longer sad.

Hannah went to the Tabernacle to truly meet with God and worship Him. She realized that her husband could not give her a child and that only God could. She had come to the house of the Lord to seek from God and to sacrifice to God. Hannah called her son Samuel, meaning heard of God, because she had asked for him from the LORD. She realized that the birth of her son was God's intervention and was in response to her prayers. So Hannah fulfilled her vow to dedicate her son to serve the Lord all the days of his life and she presented her son to the High Priest. Then she worshiped God and praised Him as she prayed: *"My heart rejoices in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. No one is holy like the LORD, for [there is] none besides You, nor [is there] any rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD [is] the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men [are] broken, and those who stumbled are girded with strength. [Those who were] full have hired themselves out for bread, and the hungry have ceased [to hunger]. Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble. The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust [and] lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set [them] among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth [are] the LORD'S, and He has set the world upon them. He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness. For by strength no man shall prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed"* [1 Samuel 2:1-10].

Hannah's prayer is a song of praise to the Lord. The depth of godly character, fashioned through prayer, is displayed in her praise, and is in contrast to the depravity of her culture. After giving her son to the Lord, Hannah poured out her heart in thanksgiving. Her words reveal an intimate knowledge of God, His character, and His works. The prayer gives thanks to God for vindication against her enemies. The prayer also reveals God's inspiration as Hannah's words go beyond her domestic conflict to prophetically picture Israel's triumph over her foes and to the eventual reign of Jesus the Christ. When Mary, the mother of Jesus, prayed her song of praise, often called the Magnificat [Luke 1:46-55], she was influenced and inspired by Hannah's song. The same godly character that had been fashioned in Hannah was also demonstrated in Mary.

Another account of the relationship between prayer and godly character is revealed in the story of Yussel's Prayer. Through prayer, the heart of God is discovered, the humility of God is discovered, and the hope of God is discovered. The story takes place in a rural Jewish community in Eastern Europe. One of the village's leading citizens is preparing to observe the Feast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, with his family. His sons adorn themselves with their finest clothes as they prepare to go to synagogue. The sons scorn the idea that Yussel would join them at the synagogue. Yussel is an orphan who tends to the livestock and sleeps in the barn. Yussel plays his flute in the pastures as he cares for the animals much like David, who played as he cared for the family sheep. His clothes have holes, he is dirty, and the sons perceive him as an embarrassment to the family. Yussel wants to go to the synagogue with the family, but he seems to be content despite the decision that he will remain with the livestock. Meanwhile, the father and his sons arrive at the synagogue and are seated in a prominent position consistent with their stature in the community.

Yom Kippur is the most holy day on the Hebrew calendar. On that day, the Jews seek to be forgiven by God for their transgressions as well as seeking forgiveness from their fellow man. God set aside this day to help men focus on restoring their relationship with God and with one another. Unfortunately, it is easier to see someone else's imperfections than our own because it is our tendency to fail to discover or admit our character defects. Other times we can focus on our behavior and fail to consider the deficiency in our attitude.

As the Yom Kippur service nears conclusion, the father and his sons are becoming impatient. As the sun prepares to go down, they know the service will soon conclude. Despite the purpose of the day, and despite the hours of congregational prayer, they have failed to be transformed in their character. As the first stars appear in the night sky, they become frustrated that the rabbi continues to pray and has failed to dismiss the congregation so that they can go to their homes and enjoy a festive meal and break the fast. Finally, and suddenly, the rabbi concludes the service and dismisses the congregation. The family patriarch approaches the Rabbi to determine the reason for the delay and the abrupt ending. The rabbi explains that as he was praying for the congregation, he saw a vision. In the vision, the prayers of the congregation were going up to heaven but they were stopped at a large gate, unable to enter. But then a melody played on a flute ascended up to heaven and the gates opened and the prayers entered in. The father makes the connection between the vision and Yussel in the fields humbly playing his flute to God.

As the father walks back home with his sons, he is considering the vision, and he is also thinking about Yussel. He comes to a greater appreciation of the heart of God. He realizes that it was Yussel's prayers that were accepted by God and effectively opened the doors to the prayers of others. Yussel was accepted by God even when the father and his sons had failed to accept him. The father now realizes that he was in error. His time of prayer to God had helped prepare him to receive this lesson from God.

The time of prayer had helped him to discover the humility of God. The father and his sons had assumed that they were better than Yussel and better than others in the village. The father

returns to the home and instructs his sons to bring Yussel from the fields to join the family for the festive meal. The sons are offended that their father would suggest that Yussel would join the family for dinner rather than eating in the barn with the livestock. They object that Yussel is dirty and so are his clothes. The father insists that his sons bring Yussel into the home for dinner. The father realized that his prominent position in the community had helped to foster a sense of pride that he was better than others. He had come to realize, as he heard from God, that he was no better than Yussel. He had discovered the humility of God. The time of prayer had helped the father to discover the hope of God. As the rabbi shared the vision, the father realized that God truly wanted to receive the prayers of the congregation. But the prayers were not initially accepted by God because they had been offered by people whose hearts were apathetic to God. Nevertheless when Yussel's prayer was offered to God, it was accepted. The hope of the faithful is that God will accept the repentant and they will be restored in their relationship with God. The father learned the most important character lesson: God will receive the humble and resist the proud. God not only wants to see our relationship with Him restored, but He also wants to see our relationships with one another restored. As the father comes to appreciate that he has been forgiven and restored in his relationship with God, it is only reasonable for Him to want to be reconciled in his relationship with Yussel. This is the hope of God, and the message of Yom Kippur: that God and man can be restored and that men should be restored with one another. This hope is made possible through the work of Jesus on the Cross. Through prayer, we develop the character to appreciate the heart of God, the humility of God, and the hope of God.

### ***Confession***

God desires to prepare our hearts to realize where our lives are inconsistent with His will. Confession is linked with character because the development of spiritual maturity helps us to understand our error, and humility yields a desire to admit we are wrong. When we ask God to forgive our debts, we are confessing to God. We are asking God to no longer hold our sin against us. God does not literally forget our sin. He is all knowing, so it is impossible for God to forget our sin, but He no longer remembers our sin in the sense that He no longer accounts it to us. Our sin is an obstacle to prayer. God will not hear prayer offered from an unclean heart:

*"If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear"* [Psalm 66:18].

*"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden [His] face from you, so that He will not hear"* [Isaiah 59:1-2].

*"One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer [is] an abomination"* [Proverbs 28:9].

If we have no desire to get right with God, we should not expect a response from God. On the other hand, if we confess our sin to God and truly desire to yield our lives to Him, He assures us

He will forgive: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* [1 John 1:9].

This principle is demonstrated in the parable of the prodigal son. The son had taken his portion of the inheritance and left the family and wasted his money on fast living. When all of his money was gone, and economic times were hard, he was forced into the lowly job of feeding pigs. As the son toiled, he began to think about life on his father's farm: *"How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants'"* [Luke 15:17-19]. As the son thought about his life and his choices, he was ready to admit that he had sinned against God and against his father. As he approached his father's home, he was prepared to deliver his confession speech and ask his father to hire him as a servant. To his surprise, his father was waiting for him and rushed to receive him. The son began to confess his wrong to his father; but before he had a chance to ask to be hired as a servant, the father commanded that a great feast be prepared to celebrate the son's return.

In a similar way, God desires to restore our relationship with him. When we come to our senses and realize that we have departed from Him, it is reasonable for us to want to return to Him. We remember that life with our Father is better than life in the world. Sometimes we are reluctant to return to Him because we wonder whether God will accept us. The parable of the lost son teaches us that if we confess our sin to God, He will receive us and forgive us.

Prayer helps to prepare us to confess our wrongs, especially hidden wrongs, because it helps us to focus on God. When we begin to focus on God, and the reality of His holiness and grandeur, we see ourselves in a new light. Consider again the experience of the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah began to perceive the Lord, he was impressed that the angelic host praised the holiness of God and His glory. The prophet became aware of his own sin: *"Woe [is] me, for I am undone! Because I [am] a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."* As Isaiah confessed his sin, God brought restoration and cleansing. The prophet was now prepared to serve the Lord, and Isaiah eagerly volunteered to be used by God.

Once we learn the principle that God requires us to confess our sin as a condition to His hearing our prayer, we might wonder what sin(s) we need to confess. As we grow in our relationship with God, we begin to appreciate that each day we frequently sin against God in our attitudes and actions. Do we need to confess each sin separately? What if we neglect to confess a particular sin? Will God not hear us?

In the case of Isaiah, we see that he confessed his sin generally rather than reciting each individual transgression; and God accepted his confession. It is the humble attitude that reflects our appreciation of God's perfection and our imperfection that God is seeking. Nevertheless, as God's Spirit moves in our lives, He helps us to remember specific transgressions. When God has brought to the forefront of our memory a particular sin, we should confess our wrong and



receive His forgiveness. As we seek God in prayer, we can trust that He will move in our lives to help us to confess so that we can be prepared to worship Him. As we pray, we should ask God to reveal our attitudes and behaviors that need to be realigned. As He reveals those areas to us, we need to confess our wrongs, ask Him to help us turn away from them, and then turn to Him.

## Chapter 14: Preparation to Forgive

Not only do we need to confess where we are wrong, but we need compassion to forgive others who have harmed us. Prayer prepares the heart to develop compassion. As we pray, we are to be grateful for God's forgiveness of us, and we are to be compassionate and prepared so that we can forgive others. In the model prayer, Jesus connects our receipt of forgiveness from God and our forgiveness of others: *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."* Our desire to show compassion and forgive others is related to our awareness and appropriation of God's forgiveness of us. Similarly, our refusal to forgive others is indicative of a lack of understanding of just how much we have been forgiven. If we refuse to forgive others, we have no reason to believe that we have received God's forgiveness. Jesus made this principle clear in His teaching during the Sermon on the Mount: *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* [Matthew 6:14-15].

Compassion to forgive those who have harmed us is the heart of Jesus. Jesus also taught in the Sermon on the Mount, *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you"* [Matthew 5:44]. Jesus' teaching on compassion is a radical departure from the Greek, Roman, and Jewish perspectives that dominated the culture of His day. A typical perspective of the Gentile Empires of the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans was to take vengeance and retaliate against enemies. The Hebrews were more tolerant in that they limited retribution to the scope of the offense: *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'"* [Matthew 5:38, Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21]. In other words, if someone caused you to be blind in an eye, you could not kill him to seek retribution. Jesus' teaching raises the bar as He instructs us not only to avoid retaliation but to demonstrate love by blessing our enemies and praying for them.

Jesus' teaching about compassion was demonstrated repeatedly in the actions of His life, but the apex of compassion was displayed at the cross. As Jesus was being crucified, He prayed: *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"* [Luke 23:34]. Jesus' attitude and behavior are so radically different from our typical response that we tend to view His standard for us as impossible and reserved for God alone, or at least improbable. Nevertheless, we have the example of Stephen, the first martyr of the Church. As Stephen was being stoned, he prayed: *"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin'"* [Acts 7:59-60]. As Stephen is being murdered, he is praying for God to be compassionate to his enemies. Stephen's response was the outpouring of a heart prepared by prayer to reflect His Master's compassion.

It is difficult for us to be compassionate because we tend to be self-righteous, and we generally are not spiritually mature enough to appreciate just how much we have been forgiven. Remember the parable of the prodigal son [Luke 15]? We saw how God is ready to receive us once we confess our wrong. But there is another lesson in the parable that we learn from the reaction of the older brother. The older brother did not rejoice when his little brother returned

from his lifestyle of partying in the world. As a matter of fact he was indignant that his father received him and planned a celebration in the younger brother's honor. The older brother had tried all his life to do the right thing and to obey his father's commands. He had actually begun to persuade himself that he was the perfect son. The older brother was critical of his wayward brother and critical of his father for planning a celebration.

Although the older brother asserted that he followed all of his father's commandments, there was also the issue of attitude. The older brother may have been able to establish an impressive track record of obedient behavior, but there was a significant shortcoming in the area of attitude. The older brother lacked compassion for his younger brother. The older brother's heart did not reflect the heart of his father. Instead of compassion for the prodigal son, he was jealous that his father was throwing a party for his wayward brother, and there had never been a party for him. The father reflects the compassionate heart of God the Father not only by receiving his son upon his return from prodigal living, but he also displayed compassion as he waited for his son's return. In other words, he felt compassion for his son even before his son had realized his wrong and decided to turn from it. This is the heart of God: a heart that is compassionate towards those who have done wrong and rejoices when they do right.

We often want to be compassionate and forgive others, but we are unable to do so until we truly learn God's perspective. One day, Peter approached Jesus and asked about forgiveness. Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Peter had heard the Lord's teaching about forgiveness during the Sermon on the Mount. Peter undoubtedly wanted to impress Jesus that he "got it." The rabbis of Jesus' day urged people to forgive an offense up to three times. Peter urged that seven times would be appropriate. Peter had more than doubled the compassion offered by the rabbis, and the number seven is associated in the Scriptures with completeness or perfection. Peter certainly expected Jesus to commend and praise him for his understanding about forgiveness and compassion. Rather than give Peter a "gold star and a happy face," Jesus aligns his attitude.

Jesus said to him, "*I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven*" [Matthew 18:21-35].

Jesus begins by correcting Peter that his estimate of the extent of forgiveness was too shallow. Rather than forgiving only seven times, we are to forgive seventy times seven. Jesus is suggesting a number so large that we don't keep a record but we have a general attitude of compassion, and we are prepared to forgive. He does not want us to keep a record of wrongs. He is not suggesting that we tell someone, "That's four hundred eighty three times, you've got seven left. You better get it together in a hurry because I'm running out of forgiveness for you." Yet Jesus realized how difficult it could be for us to be truly compassionate and forgive others.

The key to compassion is summarized by Paul in his letter to the church at Ephesus: "*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you*" [Ephesians 4:32]. We are to be compassionate to one another and forgive others just as we have received forgiveness from God because of what Jesus has done for us. God's forgiveness

of us is based on grace. It is God's gift to us because of what Jesus has done for us; His forgiveness is not conditioned upon any effort on our part except to receive His grace. When we begin to appreciate just how much we have been forgiven by God, we would naturally be inclined to show compassion and forgive others.

Through prayer, our hearts are aligned with God's heart so that we gain spiritual insight. As a result we begin to understand the extent of God's forgiveness and we develop compassion for others. This is surely a blessing in and of itself. But there is the additional result that our hearts are now aligned with God's so that He delights to respond to our prayers.

A compassionate heart is necessary in all relationships, but the need for compassion is especially great in the marriage relationship. Peter addressed the issue in his first letter: *"Husbands, likewise, dwell with [them] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as [being] heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered"* [1 Peter 3:7]. Husbands and wives are to respect one another. A husband should seek to understand his wife's feelings and what motivates her thoughts and actions. He should honor her and treat her like a precious vase (weaker vessel) and realize that they share together equally in God's gifts. The characteristics of understanding, honoring, and respecting are all related to compassion. Peter warns that a husband who fails to show compassion for his wife will have his own prayers hindered. There is a correlation between our compassion for our spouse and God's willingness to respond to our prayers. Essentially, God wants to respond to the prayers of those who are close to Him, because they are likely prayers consistent with His will. A man who is close to God is going to demonstrate compassion for his spouse. On the other hand, a man who does not seek to understand his wife, honor her as precious, or fails to realize that she is an equal is likely far from God.

When we pray, we should ask God to reveal how much He has forgiven us. Then we need to ask Him to reveal areas in our life where we need to forgive others. As He reveals bitterness and resentment, we need to ask Him to soften our hearts so that we can be compassionate and forgive others.

## Chapter 15: The Cycle of Preparation

There is a cycle of prayer developing character, leading to confession, leading to compassion, and the discovery of the continuing process of the cycle. We see the cycle demonstrated in the life of the prophet Jonah. The Book of Jonah is read in synagogues on Yom Kippur [the Day of Atonement]. It portrays a picture of God's grace and forgiveness towards man and the need for forgiveness between men. Jonah's need to develop Christian character is seen in his initial response to God's call and his need to discover and manifest the heart of God. God called the prophet to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Jonah refused to go and instead planned to go in the opposite direction to Tarshish. Why does Jonah want to flee from the presence of the Lord and from God's calling upon His life? Jonah anticipates that God will call him to deliver a message to the Ninevites that will cause them to respond to God and stop their evil. Jonah then assumes God will be gracious and merciful and spare them [Jonah 4:1-2]. Jonah wants no part in it. The Ninevites had shown horrific cruelty to Jonah's people, and Jonah wants them to be destroyed.

The narrative describes the absence of Christian character and a picture of Jonah's regression: *"But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that [was] in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep"* [Jonah 1:3-5]. Four times we see the word down describing Jonah's departure from God. He went down to Joppa, and down into the ship, and down into the lowest parts of the ship, and down to sleep. Ultimately, he went down into the ocean before he was ready to return to God. Whenever we depart from our awareness of God's presence, we are going down or regressing. As Jonah slept in the boat despite the storm, it was a picture of his spiritual condition [see also, the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane]. Rather than being awake or spiritually minded to the dangerous condition, he was apathetic and indifferent to his departure from God.

Fortunately, God will often bring forth circumstances as a catalyst to develop character and such was the case with Jonah. God brought a great storm, and the sailors were overwhelmed. Ultimately, Jonah was tossed overboard into the sea. But God was completely in control as He had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah.

It was in the belly of the great fish that Jonah's attention was once again focused on God. As we focus on God, character is developed and spiritual character yields confession. The second chapter of the book begins, *"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly"* [Jonah 2:1]. Almost the entire second chapter records the prayer of Jonah as he cries out to God. The prayer describes his confession and is evidence of the preparation of prayer. He confesses his neglect of God, his rebellion against God, and his need to look again towards God's dwelling and remember Him. His confession is indicative of the request *"forgive us our*

*debts,*” but lacks the compassion reflected in the condition “as we forgive our debtors.” Accordingly, we see the development of character as demonstrated by the prayer of confession; we also see the need to move to the next step in the cycle demonstrated by compassion.

Jonah decided to be obedient to God, but he is still in need of an attitude adjustment. The prophet went to Nineveh and proclaimed God’s message; the people of Nineveh repented and turned from their evil to God. This is truly an incredible work of God and the largest evangelistic effort described in the Scriptures. The population of the city was likely more than a half million, and they came to God in mass. The events at Nineveh were greater than any work in Jerusalem at Pentecost or at Samaria in response to the ministry of Philip the evangelist. Certainly the man of God should have been extremely pleased by the response of the people to repent. But it actually displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry [4:1]. It was easy for Jonah to see how evil the Ninevites were, but Jonah could not see how much he had been forgiven. It had been less than forty days since Jonah had rebelled against God, but God had forgiven and restored Jonah. Still Jonah had no compassion for the Ninevites.

Jonah prayed to the Lord and expressed his displeasure that God had shown grace and mercy to the Ninevites. Jonah was so upset that he wanted God to take his life. It is good to know that God doesn’t answer all of our requests and when he declines to answer, it is for our good. Instead, God speaks to Jonah to help him see the need for compassion, and the need to forgive the Ninevites. Prayer is intended to be a dialogue in which we speak with God and also listen to Him as He communicates with us. The Lord asks Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry?” The preparation of prayer is not only to hear God speak but to respond appropriately. The obvious answer is that Jonah was wrong to be angry. Instead of answering the Lord, Jonah departed out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. It is significant that God tells us that Jonah went to the east because it is a picture of Jonah once again departing from God’s presence. When Cain murdered his brother Abel, he was cast east of Eden symbolizing his departure from the presence of God. When the Tabernacle and the Temple were built, God gave specific directions for the construction. In both instances, worshipers entered from the east and progressed to the west as they moved towards the Holy of Holies where God’s presence was manifest.

God desires to develop Christian character that will yield confession of sin and compassion so that we learn to forgive others. Jonah had not yet learned the compassion phase of the cycle, so God uses an object lesson to teach Jonah. God prepares a plant to provide shade for Jonah from the miserable heat. Jonah was grateful for the relief. But the next morning God prepared a worm to consume the plant and once again expose Jonah to the elements of the intense sun and wind. Jonah once again wants to die. God again speaks to Jonah and asks, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” Jonah’s response shows the hardness of his heart: *“It is right for me to be angry, even to death!”* Once again, God speaks to Jonah: *“You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?”* [Jonah 4:10-11] The purpose of the inquiry is to help Jonah to see that if Jonah

is upset about the destruction of a plant, how much more should God have compassion upon the Ninevites, people made in the image of God, and spare them. Especially one hundred and twenty thousand small children who were too young to be responsible for any evil inflicted upon the Hebrews.

It is interesting that the book closes with God's inquiry as the final word. We have no record of Jonah's response. Did Jonah understand the heart of God to demonstrate compassion and grace? Did Jonah finally become prepared through prayer and forgive those who had trespassed against his people as Jonah had been forgiven by God for his sin? Will we develop the character through prayer that we can hear God and discover His heart and mind so that our hearts will be prepared? Will we be able to realize how much we have been forgiven by God so that we can in turn forgive others who have hurt us? I am optimistic that Jonah's heart was changed as he heard God speak, and we are likely to be changed as well.

Unfortunately, we often go through a cycle too. We develop Christian character as we communicate with God through prayer. This allows us to see where we are amiss and to confess our wrongs and seek forgiveness. Yet we are often not prepared to forgive others. The next phase is to develop compassion. Once we arrive at the compassion stage, we may discover that we have difficulty remaining there. We need to continue to be prepared by praying, developing character, confessing our sin, and having compassion: *"forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."*

## **Preparation Study Guide**

1. How can prayer help to prepare us?
2. How can prayer help us to confess?
3. How can prayer help us to forgive?
4. What lesson(s) did you learn from the life of Jonah?



## **Section Six: Protection**

**"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."**

In this section we consider the following themes regarding prayer and protection:

**we need God's protection  
we need God to deliver us  
lessons learned from the life of David**

## Chapter 16: We Need God's Protection

Here the theme is our need for God's protection from temptation. When we think of the "Lord's Prayer," we often think of the model prayer, "Our Father," where Jesus responded to the disciples request to teach them to pray. But if we want to see our Lord's prayer, an ideal place to look is Jesus' prayer in the Upper Room, shortly before the cross. As we examine Jesus' prayer, we see our need for protection: *"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one"* [John 17:15]. Jesus prays that the Father will protect us from the evil one. Jesus would soon be coming home to the Father, but the disciples would continue their ministry on this earth as empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was well aware of the opposition they would face from devil. Therefore, Jesus is praying for protection for the disciples. Essentially, Jesus is confirming that apart from God's protection, we will be overcome by evil.

Jesus not only revealed this truth in His prayer at the end of His ministry, but He demonstrated this truth at the beginning of His ministry. In the fourth chapter of Matthew's gospel we are told that Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. Why would the Spirit lead Jesus to be tempted by the devil? Perhaps it was to establish that Jesus was in fact the Messiah as demonstrated by His response. Also, we learn from the account how to respond to temptation: dependence on God's protection and reliance upon the Word of God. For forty days and nights Jesus was fasting and presumably in prayer. Forty is a number associated in the Scriptures with testing. The flood of Noah's days lasted forty days and nights; the Hebrews were in the wilderness for forty years; Moses was on Mount Sinai forty days as he received the Law.

Jesus was drawing close to the Father, but He was also hungry and weak. At a time when He appeared particularly weak, the enemy of men's souls came to tempt Him and he said, *"If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."* But He answered and said, *it is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'"* [Matthew 4:3-4]. In each of the temptations, Jesus responds by quoting from the Scriptures. Jesus contrasts Satan's misrepresentations of God and the truth of God as revealed in His Word. Rather than exercising His authority as God and simply dismissing the tempter, Jesus demonstrates that victory flows from dependence upon God and obedience to His Word. Matthew tells us that at the conclusion of a series of three temptations, and three responses from the Scriptures, the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him. Luke observes the tempter departed until an opportune time [Luke 4:13].

Satan continues to look for an opportune time to tempt us and neutralize our effectiveness for Jesus. The lesson learned from Jesus' ministry, from start to finish, is we need God's protection and strength to have victory over our flesh and the temptations of the devil.

When we consider protection from temptation, we need to remember God does not tempt us but we are drawn away by our own desires: *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has*

*conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death"* [James 1:13-17]. Desire begins in the mind. There is a battle as our flesh is enticed by the tempter, and God seeks to strengthen our spirit to have victory over the flesh. The lust of our flesh begins in our mind whether it is substance abuse, lust, or lying. If those thoughts are not taken captive, they result in actions and attitudes that separate us from God. When we read in our English Bibles the words "testing" or "temptation," it is the same Greek word *peirasmos*. The translation depends upon the context. Satan tempts us to draw us away from an intimate relationship with God. On the other hand, God allows testing to grow us in our relationship with Him. Although Satan wants to separate us from God, the Father wants us to depend upon Him for protection and victory. J. Hudson Taylor observed, "Satan the hinderer may build a barrier about us, but He can never roof us in so that we cannot look up." The key is to learn to look to God for protection; unfortunately, until we appreciate our dependence upon Him, we are unlikely to look up.

Luke's account of the events in the Upper Room gives us additional insight in regard to the need to depend upon God for protection [Luke 22:14-33]. Jesus gathered His disciples to celebrate the Passover. It was only hours before His arrest and crucifixion. The Lord reminded the disciples of the soon coming events, but they were more focused on their anticipated positions in His coming kingdom. Jesus taught them that true greatness is found in serving others rather than being served by them. The Lord then predicted His betrayal and sought to initiate communion with His followers through the Lord's Supper.

In the midst of the scene there is a dilemma: Jesus wants to have an intimate relationship with His disciples, but they are focused on position, prominence, power, and pride. We can never have intimate time with God when we are preoccupied with the physical world rather than spiritual truth. When we are focused on the physical world, we seek to be self-reliant and independent of God, and this is a dangerous condition. Unfortunately, Peter and the disciples failed to realize their need to depend on God, but Jesus sought to teach Peter, the disciples, and us the need to depend on God and the connection to prayer.

And the Lord said, "*Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift [you] as wheat"* [Luke 22:31]. Imagine Satan asking for you by name, wanting to destroy you. Peter would be a future church leader, and the devil wanted to defeat God's plan and His people. What God loves, the enemy hates and wants to destroy. Jesus informed Peter of His response to Satan's request: "*But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to [Me], strengthen your brethren"* [Luke 22:32]. As an aside, we should observe that Satan had to ask permission from God before he was allowed to harm God's people [see also, Job 1-2]. Note that Jesus responds by intercession in prayer as a means to protect us. As a result of God's protection, Satan is limited in the scope of his threat to Peter.

The principle to learn is that God wants to get our attention regarding the danger of temptation to sin and His desire to protect us. We see this principle demonstrated in the very beginning of the Bible in the account of Cain and his brother, Abel [Genesis 4:1-7]. Cain was jealous and angry that God was pleased with Abel's offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.

Before Cain sinned and harmed his brother, God intervened: *"So the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire [is] for you, but you should rule over it'"* [Genesis 4:6-7]. God sought to warn Cain that there was a very real danger from imminent sin. The desire to sin wants to rule our flesh and our minds, but God wants us to have victory over temptation. With God's help, we can rule over temptation rather than being ruled by it. Unfortunately, Cain refused to heed the warning and seek God's protection, and he murdered his brother. Despite this repeated warning throughout the Scriptures, it is a difficult lesson for us to truly learn.

Although Jesus limits the scope of harm that Satan may inflict upon Peter, Jesus will allow Peter to stumble to teach Peter the need to learn to depend on God. Jesus predicts that Peter will fail and fall away for a time, *"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to [Me], strengthen your brethren."* Ultimately, Peter's faith shall not fail. When Peter returns, He will have learned his need to depend on God, and he will be able to strengthen his brothers. Had Peter continued to believe that he could prevail in his own strength, not only would he not strengthen his brothers, but he would have become an obstacle. He would have weakened the other disciples by giving the wrong example that we can overcome in our strength without depending on God's protection.

Unfortunately, it is difficult for us to see our need to depend on Jesus for protection from temptation. Peter still believed that he could have victory in his own strength and resources. Peter protests the Lord's prediction that he would fall away: *"But he said to Him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death'"* [Luke 22:33]. Peter was certainly sincere in his expression of his commitment to Jesus, but he did not appreciate the significance of his declaration. In effect, Jesus had declared that Satan sought to destroy Peter and without the Lord's intervention, Peter would be completely overcome. Peter's response effectively declares, because of Peter's commitment and his strength, he would not fall away. It is important to remember that whenever we argue with God, we are wrong. In addition, it is important to see the effect of Peter's declaration upon the other disciples: *"Peter said to Him, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' And so said all the disciples"* [Matthew 26:35]. The spirit of self-reliance was contagious. As Peter pledged his allegiance, so too did the other disciples. Never did they stop to realize that in their own resources they lacked the ability to overcome temptation. This truth was alluded to in Jesus' response predicting Peter's denial: *"Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times"* [Matthew 26:34]. Unfortunately, despite the Lord's prediction, Peter continued to believe that He could overcome in his own strength.

So Jesus took the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to continue the lesson regarding protection from temptation, prayer, and dependence upon God. Jesus entered the Garden with the eleven [Judas had already departed], and he went deeper into the Garden with Peter, James, and John. Then the Lord separated Himself to pray alone [Matthew 26:36-46]. As Jesus returned to the disciples, He found them sleeping and said to Peter, *"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed [is] willing, but the flesh [is] weak"* [Matthew 26:41].

Preliminarily, it should be noted that Jesus addressed his comment initially to Peter. The lesson to depend on God through prayer can be communicated to many, but it is always learned one person at a time. Peter would need to learn the lesson so that he could later strengthen his brothers. When Jesus urges us to “watch,” what does he mean? The term relates to spiritual preparation and awareness that is attained, and is maintained, through prayer. The Lord also made clear that there is a conflict between the spiritual and the physical: *“The spirit indeed [is] willing, but the flesh [is] weak.”* In this conflict, the nature we feed the most is likely to prevail. As we study the Word, spend time with other believers, and pray we are feeding our spirit and learning to depend on God.

When Jesus came to the disciples, he found them sleeping and warned them that failure to pray would likely result in their yielding to temptation. Jesus was likely referring to the need to pray to resist temptation generally; He was also likely referring to the temptation to deny Him. It is interesting to consider that whenever we fail to pray and rely upon ourselves, or we yield to temptation, we are in effect denying Him.

Peter did in fact deny the Lord three times before the rooster crowed, just as Jesus predicted. But his faith did not fail and he returned to the Lord and strengthened his brothers just as the Lord had advised. Through the process, Peter actually learned the lesson that he needed to depend on God for protection from temptation. As Peter wrote his letters to the church, he shared this lesson: *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world”* [1 Peter 5:6-9].

Peter’s life and the message he shared reflected the change in his life as he had learned to depend upon God. Consider four important themes running through Peter’s message:

#### *Be humble*

God will create and allow circumstances in our lives to encourage us to depend on Him. When we humble ourselves to admit that we need God, He will lift us up.

#### *Be comforted*

We can cast all of our cares upon God. He wants us to trust Him with all of our concerns. He cares about the big and the small cares. Through prayer we can share our heart with God knowing that He is listening and that He cares.

#### *Be ready*

Peter tells us to be sober and vigilant because the devil is an adversary who is opposed to the things of God and wants to defeat and destroy us. When we ignore the threat of the enemy or neglect to depend upon God, we become an easy target for the devil. Peter describes the devil as a roaring lion seeking whom He may devour. The lamb close to the Good Shepherd is

protected from the lion. The lamb that fails to perceive the threat of the lion or believes that he can defeat the lion in his own strength is likely to be harmed.

*Be steadfast*

The way to resist the enemy is to remain steadfast in the faith. We remain steadfast when we depend on our Lord and don't deny Him. Peter reminded his audience that their brothers were experiencing the same suffering. Peter was referring to the persecution of Christians under Emperor Nero and the pressure to deny the Lord and a relationship with Him.

Every day in every way we are faced with trials and tests in our lives that either affirm our dependence upon Him and His protection or in effect deny Him. The devil's plan is to present temptations to deny Jesus and His place in our lives. Decide now to resist him and depend upon God and his protection. That way, when we are tempted, we will know how to respond.

## Chapter 17: We Need God to Deliver Us

God wants to deliver us from the evil one. The primary purpose of Jesus' ministry is to defeat the enemy's power over man and set us free to worship God. *"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil"* [1 John 3:8]. The Scriptures tell us that we are not ignorant of Satan's devices [2 Corinthians 2:11]. Nevertheless, we often neglect to consider Satan's schemes and the importance of prayer to deliver us from the evil one.

In the sixth chapter of Ephesians, Paul instructs us: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil"* [Ephesians 6:10-11]. Paul wrote to the Ephesians from a Roman prison. As he considers the armor of his Roman jailer, Paul makes an analogy to the believer's spiritual armor. Paul encourages us to avail ourselves of the protection that God has provided for us in our spiritual battle against the enemy of men's souls. As Paul paints the picture, he describes the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation. These elements of our armor could be described as defensive protection.

But the Roman soldier was also equipped with offensive weapons: *"And take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"* [Ephesians 6:17-18]. Paul describes the word of God as the sword of the Spirit or our offensive weapon in the battle. Notice that Paul links the word of God and prayer. He makes it clear that we have offensive weapons available to us in the word of God and prayer. Essentially, we are to have a lifestyle characterized by prayer. We are to be in constant communication with God as prompted by the Spirit of God. Our prayer should be all encompassing. We are to pray at all times, with all prayer and supplication, with all perseverance, and for all the saints.

It is essential we learn that prayer is the key to victory, protection, and deliverance from the evil one. Our battle is spiritual in nature: *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual [hosts] of wickedness in the heavenly [places]"* [Ephesians 6:12]. Accordingly, we need spiritual weapons: prayer and the word of God. The very powers of darkness are paralyzed by prayer. Prayer is a spiritual battering ram that defeats and delivers us from the enemy's strength: *"For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds"* [2 Corinthians 10:4]. It is no wonder that the enemy seeks to distract us from praying. We can be distracted by the mundane issues of life: balancing a checkbook, doing laundry, and recreation. We can even be distracted by serving the Lord apart from prayer. We can become so busy in our ministry that we neglect to pray. Certainly, the enemy of men's souls is most threatened by the delivering force of prayer. The church's organization, methods, marketing, and machinery are powerless to deliver apart from prayer.

What are the enemy's tactics to neutralize believers? How does prayer deliver us from the enemy's schemes? Let us consider the primary schemes in the devil's playbook: domination,

doubt, division, depression, discouragement, distraction, and death. Here we will consider examples of each in the Scriptures and the effect of prayer to deliver.

### **Domination**

The devil wants to oppress believers so that they are unable to freely worship God. When the Hebrews were in bondage in Egypt, they were oppressed and were unable to worship. Ultimately, the Hebrews cried to God, and He heard their prayers: *"Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage"* [Exodus 2:23]. God called Moses to be a deliverer. *"Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness"'"* [Exodus 5:1]. God heard the prayers of the Hebrews and delivered them from the oppressive domination of Pharaoh and the devil. Then God's people were free to worship Him. If you feel oppressed and unable to worship, cry out to God and He will set you free.

### **Doubt**

The enemy uses fear as a tactic to keep us from freely worshiping God. One day, as Jesus and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee, a great storm arose. As the waves covered the boat, the disciples became greatly afraid that they were going to perish. Despite the tempest, Jesus was sound asleep below deck. Then His disciples came to [Him] and awoke Him, saying, *"Lord, save us! We are perishing!" But He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?' Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, 'Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?'"* [Matthew 8:24-27] Jesus was not disturbed by the storm but awoke to respond to the cry of His disciples. When our children were small, my wife could sleep through almost any noise except a noise from the kids' bedroom. The slightest alarming noise from the kids and she was awake and responsive. God is attentive and responsive to His children, so we need not fear.

Jesus gently rebuked them for their fear. Why be afraid when God is with you? Jesus told the disciples [Mark 4:35]. If He tells us to cross over, we are not going to "go under," but in fact we will cross over. Therefore we should not doubt because we have learned that God is with us and, *"Let us cross over to the other side"* and will protect us. Notice that when Jesus awoke, He rebuked the storm, and the sea became calm. The fact that Jesus rebuked the storm suggests that the storm was related to the works of the devil. The devil wants to frighten us with threatening circumstances that draw our attention away from the reality of God and His presence. The Lord will allow these circumstances [cf. Psalm 107:24-30, esp. vs. 25] so that we cry out to Him and He can respond to our prayers. As a result, we marvel and draw our attention to Him, and want to know more about Him. If you are experiencing frightening circumstances, pray and God will comfort you.

### **Division**

One of the enemy's tactics is conflict between believers that causes division. After Jesus' death and resurrection, He appeared to the disciples and encouraged them about their ministry as empowered by the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus ascended into heaven. Certainly, it was a tense time



as they feared persecution and wondered whether and when He would return, and when and how they would receive the Holy Spirit. The disciples had frequently argued about who would have positions of authority in the Lord's kingdom. The Master had always been there to correct the disciples' attitudes, but now He was gone. The environment was ripe for conflict and division.

But there was no conflict. Why? We learn that they gathered together to pray in the Upper Room and wait for the Holy Spirit. As they continued to pray, they were with one accord. They were in unity because they were seeking God, and they were hearing from Him [Acts 1:4-14]. When we are in conflict with someone, the key to unity is prayer. When we pray for them and with them, we begin to see the reality of God's perspective. Unity is established, and division is eliminated. If you are experiencing conflict, pray for God to establish unity.

### **Depression**

The enemy wants us to be depressed so that we isolate from others and withdraw from our service to God. The prophet Elijah experienced a tremendous victory at Mount Carmel over the false prophets of Baal. Then the wicked queen, Jezebel, issued a death warrant for Elijah. Elijah fled for his life. In his despair, he went and hid in a cave, and he wanted to die. In the midst of his despair, God spoke and encouraged the prophet that He had everything under control. Then God once again commissioned Elijah for ministry [1Kings 19:9-19].

As Elijah cried out to God in the pains of his depression, God spoke in a still small voice and encouraged. This is the essence of prayer... communication with God. When God speaks, the ominous dark cloud that plagues us is lifted so we see that the sun has been present behind the cloud all along. If you are struggling with depression, pray and God will encourage you.

### **Discouragement**

The enemy wants to discourage us so that we stop trusting in God. In Acts 12, James, the brother of John, was executed by Herod the king. The king was a tool for the enemy to harass the church. When Herod saw that his execution of James pleased the Jews, he seized Peter. Herod intended to execute Peter at the conclusion of the Feast of Passover. This must have been an extremely discouraging time for the church. James had been a leader in the church, and God had allowed him to be martyred. Now Peter was in prison, and it seemed that the church was powerless to stop the intended evil. Rather than give up, we learn that the church offered constant prayer to God for Peter. God responded by miraculously delivering Peter from prison. Satan seeks to discourage us by deceiving us to think that God does not care. Nevertheless, as we seek God in prayer and learn to trust Him, we are encouraged by the truth that God is always good. Regardless of the discouraging circumstances and the confusion that they tend to create, we can rely upon the truth of God's love for us. If you are discouraged, pray and ask God to reveal His goodness, even in discouraging times.

### **Distraction**

One of the enemy's most effective tools is distraction. We are drawn away by the lust of the eyes and the cares of the material world around us. We can even be distracted from truly

hearing God by our efforts to serve God. One day Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of a mountain and revealed the glory of God. He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth could whiten them. Then Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, *"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."* Peter was afraid at the sight and did not know what to say or do. Peter wanted to do something good for God so he suggested they build three tents, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Then a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, *'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!'*" [Mark 9:2-7]

When Peter heard God speak, he discovered what was important to God. Peter had made two primary mistakes. First, he had been impressed that Moses, the great representative of the law, and Elijah, the great representative of the prophets, were there. Peter's address to Jesus as "rabbi" was respectful but lacked the acknowledgement of the revelation of His glory that would have been conveyed by referring to Jesus as "Lord." Essentially, by suggesting that they build three tents for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, Peter was treating them as equals. God spoke and said, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" In other words, Jesus is the one you need to hear. Only Jesus is the Son of God.

Second, Peter responded by wanting to do something for God. God speaks and directs us to hear from Jesus. God did not tell Peter, "Jesus is the one you should build a tent for; you don't need to build a tent for Moses and Elijah." Before doing for God, you need to hear from God. That truth seems axiomatic, but it is often neglected. Similarly, we can become so busy wanting to do for God that we become distracted from hearing God.

Consider Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus. They both wanted to please Jesus. As they opened their home to Jesus, Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to hear from Him. But Martha was distracted with much serving to prepare the house and the food. She resented that she was left to work alone and wanted Jesus to correct her sister. But, Jesus corrected Martha, *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her"* [Luke 10:41-42]. The priority was to hear from Jesus more than to do for Jesus.

In both the account of the events at the Mount of Transfiguration and the home of Mary and Martha, we learn that we can easily become distracted from hearing from God. Even our desire to serve God can be a distraction to hearing from God. But in both instances, God spoke and His people were able to focus on what was most important...hearing Him. This is the essence of prayer: to hear God speak and communicate intimately with Him. We must guard against distractions that keep us from hearing Him. When you feel distracted, pray and ask God to help you focus on Him.

## **Death**

The fear of death and the issue of separation from God are part of the enemy's schemes. Satan tries to frighten those who are being persecuted for their faith with the fear of death. He also

tries to persuade people that there is no life after death and therefore no issue of separation from God.

Daniel overcame the threat of death by trusting in God. When Daniel's enemies sought to plot against him, they came to realize that the only charge they could bring related to Daniel's worship of God. They tricked the king into signing a law that no one could pray to any other god except the king. The penalty for violating the decree was death by being cast into the lions' pit. But Daniel continued to pray and give thanks to God openly as was his custom since his early days [Daniel 6:10]. The enemies brought Daniel to the king and the king regretted that he had signed the law, but he could not change the law. So Daniel was cast into the lions' den to the dismay of the king. But God protected Daniel from the lions and delivered him.

Throughout the narrative in the sixth chapter, Daniel displays a tremendous sense of peace and confidence in God. Daniel was a man of prayer. He had prayed regularly to God since his childhood. As Daniel communicated intimately with God, he learned that not even the threat of death could separate him from God's love [Romans 8:38-39; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57]. Daniel lived his life seeking to speak with God and hear from God. Death would not end Daniel's life but would allow him to hear from God more intimately than he ever had.

If death frightens you, pray for God to reveal that death will not separate God from His children, but will allow us to be closer to Him than we ever have been.

## Chapter 18: Lessons from the Life of David

David was a man who was intimately familiar with God's protection, the need for dependence, and God's deliverance. His songs, as reflected in the Book of Psalms and the Book of Samuel, reflect a life forged by the reality of God's protection and deliverance. David had been chosen by God to be King over Israel because David was a man who loved God. Despite some glaring errors in the life of David, God constantly spoke of David in a positive light because David never wavered from the foundational truth that the True and Living God was his God. Not only was David king, but the Messiah was a descendant of David. In light of God's calling upon David and God's love for David he was an obvious target for the devil. As we consider the life of David, and his songs, we learn about prayer, protection, dependence and deliverance.

### **Dependence**

In Psalm 116, David described dependence upon God. We will focus on three principles: relationship, rest, and response.

### **Relationship**

First, consider the relationship between David and God: *"I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice [and] my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call [upon Him] as long as I live"* [Psalm 116:1-2]. David says, *"I love the LORD."* This is an expression of pure worship. It is also a picture of the pinnacle in our relationship with God. David loved God and prayed to Him because God heard David's prayer and answered. Therefore, David determined to pray as long as he lived. There are countless reasons why we should love the Lord, but David declares that he loves the Lord because God hears prayer. Each of us can be encouraged, because we can have a relationship with God that is characterized by love since we know He hears our prayers.

### **Rest**

Second, consider the theme of rest: *"The pains of death surrounded me,... I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the LORD: 'O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!'"* [Psalm 116:3-4]. David was surrounded by his enemies, and he prayed for God to deliver him. David then experienced God's peace: *"Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, [and] my feet from falling"* [Psalm 116:7-8]. David had rest for his soul, or peace, because he had learned that despite the affliction of the world, the opposition of the dishonest, and the betrayal of the unfaithful, God would protect him. We can have peace, even in difficult times as we pray to God and learn that we can depend upon Him.

### **Response**

Third, consider David's response: *"What shall I render to the LORD [for] all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows*

to the LORD now in the presence of all His people" [Psalms 116:12-14]. David wonders what he should do, or give, to the Lord in light of God's protection. David responds by taking up the cup of salvation. During the Passover feast, four cups of wine are consumed by each participant to remember God's four-fold promise to Israel: *"I [am] the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I [am] the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians"* [Exodus 6:6-7]. The third cup symbolizes the promise *"I will redeem you,"* and is referred to as the cup of redemption or the cup of salvation. During the Last Supper, when Jesus partakes of communion with His disciples, the cup of wine is the third cup or the cup of redemption/salvation. Communion represents an intimate relationship with God and is characterized by an awareness of God and our relationship with Him. Communion with God is the primary means to establish and enhance protection from temptation. Communion is a picture of spiritual preparation, and it is contrasted by the disciples' slumber in the Garden of Gethsemane when they should have been praying. David expressed a desire to depend upon God and have an intimate relationship with Him.

Prayer is a means of focusing on God. When we are focused on God, we can appropriate His protection from evil. When David was hunted by Saul, he hid in a cave and prayed to God for deliverance. David was entirely dependent upon God. But when David became king, and God delivered his enemies into his hands, David became complacent. David became self-reliant rather than depending upon God. We need to pray in the palace with the same sense of dependence upon God as when we are in the cave. Had David been praying in the palace, as he had prayed in the cave, in all likelihood he would have resisted the temptation involving Bathsheba. If David is examining God, rather than Bathsheba, he avoids the temptation. When our circumstances seem adverse, we tend to depend more upon God. Yet, we need the same attitude of dependence even when our circumstances seem favorable.

### ***Deliverance from enemies***

David also expressed his gratitude to God for His protection in delivering him from his enemies. In Psalms 31, 57, and 142, David describes the tension between the presence of the enemy and an awareness of God's presence. David was hiding in a cave and sought God's protection and deliverance from the pursuit of Saul. In each of these Psalms there is a pattern of themes: the plea, the problem, and the praise.

### **Plea**

*"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until [these] calamities have passed by. I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs [all things] for me"* [Psalms 57:1-2]. David passionately declared a plea for God's mercy. Two times he emphasized his cry for mercy. David did not presume that he merits God's protection but cried for God's grace and favor. David declared his

trust in God. He depended on God's protection like a chick hiding under a mother hen's wings. When you feel surrounded by problems, pray and know that God wants to protect you.

### **Problem**

*"My soul [is] among lions; I lie [among] the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth [are] spears and arrows, and their tongue is a sharp sword. They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; they have dug a pit before me; into the midst of it they [themselves] have fallen. Selah"* [Psalms 57:4, 6]. David bemoans the threat of his enemies who have surrounded him and who are stronger than he. David needs protection from their malice, their slander, and their desire to destroy him. In the midst of the danger, David feels all alone: *"When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk they have secretly set a snare for me. Look on [my] right hand and see, for [there is] no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul"* [Psalms 142:3-4]. The primary problem is not the threat of our enemies, but our perception that we are alone. Our enemies appear more menacing when we fail to realize that God is with us. When you feel overwhelmed by your circumstances, pray and ask God to reveal himself and remind you that He is with you.

### **Praise**

*"Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; the righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me"* [Psalm 142:7]. David anticipates the Lord's protection and deliverance. David urges God to deliver him so that he can praise Him: *"Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; [Let] Your glory [be] above all the earth. My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise. I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations. For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; [let] Your glory [be] above all the earth"* [Psalm 57:5-11]. David appreciates that not only does God want to deliver us because He is good and merciful, but He also wants to deliver us because He wants us to respond with praise. God delivers us so that we can respond and worship Him by offering praise to Him. When we pray and ask God to protect and deliver us, we should also praise Him for who He is and what He does for us.

### ***Deliverance from guilt***

David also expressed his gratitude for God's deliverance from guilt. There are times when we fail to avail ourselves of God's protection, and we fail to resist temptation. Through prayer, we can ask God's forgiveness and be forgiven, restored, and delivered from guilt. David expressed these truths in Psalms 32 and 51 in regard to his sin related to Bathsheba. The context of these psalms relate to when Nathan, the prophet, confronted King David one year after his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. We will consider the following themes: the burden, the basis, and the blessing.

## **Burden**

*"Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God..."* [Psalm 51:14]. David understood that only God could deliver him from his guilt. David felt dirty and ashamed before God and sought to be restored. David realized that, although he had done wrong to Bathsheba and to Uriah, that primarily his sin was against God: *"Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done [this] evil in Your sight"* [Psalm 51:4]. David described the weight of guilt: *"When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah"* [Psalm 32:3-4]. David's guilt was so heavy because he refused to confess. In his silence, it felt as if his bones were growing old from his anguish. As God's Spirit brought conviction, it was like God's hand was pressing down upon him day and night without relief. When we have failed to resist temptation, and we have done wrong, the Holy Spirit brings a sense of conviction that we are not right with God in our experience. That sense of guilt is intended to stir us to come to God and be restored.

## **Basis**

*"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah"* [Psalm 32:5]. David understood that forgiveness flows from God when we confess our sin and yield our lives to Him: *"He who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him"* [Psalm 32:10]. God delights to be merciful to us when we desire to be humble before Him. God wants our hearts more than a sacrifice of our treasure or our service: *"For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give [it]; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God [are] a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise"* [Psalm 51:16-17]. The basis of deliverance from guilt is to humbly admit to God where we have been wrong and to return to Him. As we pray to God, we can truly admit our wrongs, and be confident that He will forgive us. Because God is merciful, He wants to forgive His children.

## **Blessing**

*"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit"* [Psalm 32:1-2]. David expressed the happiness available to those who have been forgiven by God. In the Old Testament, the faithful rejoiced that their sin had been covered. In the New Testament, because of the work of Jesus, our confessed sins are completely forgiven by God. David wanted God to clean his heart (i.e., his thoughts and emotions) and help him renew his commitment to the Lord: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"* [Psalm 51:10]. David knew that once God forgave him, his joy would return because he had a right relationship with God: *"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me [by Your] generous Spirit"* [Psalm 51:12]. *"Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all [you] upright in heart!"* [Psalm 32:11]. When we confess to God and He delivers us from guilt, we are blessed and we rejoice. The heavy burden of guilt has been lifted from us so that we are free to worship God and enjoy His protection.

## Protection Study Guide

1. Why do we need God's protection?
2. How can prayer help keep us from temptation?
3. Review the description of the devil's schemes in the section "we need God to deliver us." What area(s) seem the most important to you at this time in your life? What did you learn?
4. What lesson(s) did you learn from the life of David?



## Section Seven: Power

**"For Yours is the kingdom and the power of the glory forever. Amen."**

In this section we consider the power of prayer. Does prayer really make a difference? Some manuscripts omit the last portion of Matthew 6:13, *"For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."* Nevertheless, there is abundant manuscript support, and the theme of the power of prayer is of prime importance to our study. Billy Sunday, a former professional baseball player and evangelist, observed: "If you are strangers to prayer you are strangers to power." It is one thing to believe the power is available, but another thing to practice it.

## Chapter 19: The Power Available Through Prayer

The conclusion to the Lord's prayer reminds us that God the Father and God the Son dwell in the place of authority. Nothing is too hard for God. *"Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You"* [Jeremiah 32:17].

Difficulty is measured by the capacity of the agent called upon to do the work. For example, when God brings healing to a body suffering from cancer, raises a body from the dead, or heals a cold it makes no difference to God in the sense that His power is not drained. He has all power and can choose to exercise all authority.

The problem is not availing of the power available through prayer. God wants to demonstrate and display His power in and through the life of the believer so that He may be glorified. The primary reasons for divine intervention are to minister to our needs and to bring glory to God. Prayer not only prepares us for greater works but it is the greater work. Prayer demonstrates that all authority is vested in God as King, and He deserves all glory. Prayer is limitless in scope and power. We can pray for God to intervene anywhere around the globe. But our personal service is limited to a particular area.

People that God uses are people who grasp the power of prayer and seek to see the power demonstrated rather than remaining dormant. Martin Luther, used by God in the Protestant Reformation, understood the power of prayer. In 1540, Luther's great friend and assistant, Frederick Myconius, was dying and wrote a farewell note to Luther. When Martin Luther received the letter, he immediately sent this note: "I command thee in the name of God to live because I still have need of thee in the work of reforming the church. The Lord will never let me hear that thou art dead, but will permit thee to survive me. For this I am praying, this is my will, and may my will be done, because I seek only to glorify the name of God." Myconius regained his strength and outlived Luther by two months.

C.H. Spurgeon was used by God to build London's Metropolitan Tabernacle into the world's largest independent congregation during the nineteenth century. When people toured the church, Spurgeon would take them to the basement prayer room where people were praying constantly. Spurgeon described the room as the powerhouse of the church. Spurgeon grasped the power of prayer.

In a similar manner, John Wesley sought to appropriate the power of prayer. Wesley remarked, "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone shall shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth. God does nothing but in answer to prayer."

God's power to bless is not limited by our ability to fully understand the abundance of power as much as it is limited by our unwillingness to avail ourselves of the power through prayer. He

desires to manifest His power in response to prayer. When we begin to appreciate the power available to us through prayer, we will pray differently.

God delights to demonstrate His authority. Frequently, the demonstration of His dominion is in response to the prayers of the faithful. Consider the account of the prophet Elijah at Mount Carmel. Elijah ministered during a time when many of the people in Israel had turned to idolatry and worshiped the Canaanite god, Baal. *"Elijah came to all the people, and said, 'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD [is] God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' But the people answered him not a word"* [1 Kings 18:21].

Elijah challenged the people to choose to follow the true God. The people should have responded by repenting from their idolatry and returning to the Lord, but they remained silent. So Elijah proposed a challenge against the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal to determine the true God. Two bulls would be prepared for sacrifice, but no fire would be prepared. The false prophets would call on their gods, and Elijah would call on the name of the Lord; the God who answered by fire, He is God. All the people and the prophets of Baal agreed to the challenge.

Elijah offered to let the prophets of Baal go first. So from morning until evening they called upon their god, and they engaged in their rituals, but there was no response; the offering was not consumed by fire. Then Elijah urged the people to come near. He repaired the altar of the Lord and placed the offering upon the altar. Then Elijah commanded the people to take the large ceramic vessels that were present and soak the wood, as well as the offering, with water. The prophets of Baal had not soaked the wood or offering with water, but Elijah commanded the people of Israel to do so, not only once but three times. Elijah wanted to clearly demonstrate the dominion of the true God.

*"And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and [that] I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and [that] You have turned their hearts back to You again.' Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God'"* [1 Kings 18:36-39].

God demonstrated his dominion by consuming the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and even the water. But notice that God's demonstration of His authority was in response to the prayers of Elijah. Unfortunately, the people had not prayed for the Lord to demonstrate his power. God did not require the people to pray, and He did not need Elijah to pray. Nevertheless, God delights to demonstrate His power on behalf of those whose hearts are loyal to Him. Also observe that God's demonstration of power had the desired effect of establishing His place among the people. The people fell down and worshiped God and declared that He was truly God.

Prayer has as much power today as in the days of Elijah—God has not changed. James, the half brother of Jesus, sought to remind the church of this truth: *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess [your] trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months"* [James 5:13-17].

James was a man who understood the importance of prayer. He was fervent in prayer and spent many hours praying. It was said that James had knees like a camel because his knees were calloused from praying. James urges us to pray with confidence in God when we are suffering and when we are sick. As we pray with spiritually mature people, such as elders, we are encouraged by their confidence in God, and it helps to assure us that God will respond [albeit according to His perfect will]. When we anoint with oil, it is not intended to be a ritual, nor is it merely the medicinal value of oil. Rather oil is a picture of the work of the Holy Spirit. We pray and anoint in the name of the Lord as a reminder of His authority as well as His nature. It is God's nature to want to restore, and God will hear and answer our prayers.

When we have done wrong, we need to confess to God. He will hear our humble prayers, and we will be forgiven. When we have done wrong to another, we need to confess our wrong. Ideally, we confess our wrong to the person we have harmed, and we pray with him. Sometimes, God allows an illness or adverse circumstances to correct us for our wrong or to draw us back to Him. Prayer with humility and confidence prompts God and us. It helps to promote spiritual, physical and emotional healing.

James declares, *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."* If we are right with God, and we steadfastly and passionately pray, God delights to demonstrate His dominion. Prayer truly makes a difference! To encourage us, James reminds us that Elijah was a man just like us: *"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months"* [James 5:13-17]. We read that Elijah was prompted by God to predict a drought, and God stopped the rain [1 Kings 17:1-7]. Three and a half years later, Elijah prayed, and God brought rain: *"And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit"* [1 Kings 18:41-45, James 5:18].

The same power that was demonstrated in the life of Elijah is available to the church because God has not changed. He still wants to demonstrate His dominion so that He may be glorified. The power was not part of Elijah's nature; he was a person with all the human frailties that we have. Nevertheless, Elijah understood that God would use human instruments to demonstrate His authority. And because Elijah was right with God, and he prayed steadfastly and passionately to God, God's dominion was displayed. The same power is available to us. We simply need to avail ourselves of this power through prayer.

## Chapter 20: The Power to Defeat the Enemy

Through prayer, the enemy is defeated. Andrew Murray observed, "God's child can conquer everything by prayer. Is it any wonder that Satan does his utmost to snatch that weapon from the Christian or to hinder his use of it." Jesus associates spiritual power with prayer and fasting. C.H. Spurgeon said, "Prayer links us to heaven and fasting separates us from earth."

The contrast between God's available power and man's weakness apart from God's strength is dramatically portrayed in the events at a mountain top and the valley below. Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain by themselves. We know the place as the Mount of Transfiguration because it was there that Jesus revealed His Divine glory that had previously been veiled by human flesh. In essence, all power on heaven and earth was revealed on that mountain top. Meanwhile, in the valley below, the other disciples were struggling with the enemy. A father presented his demon-possessed son to the disciples and sought their intervention. The disciples were seemingly powerless to defeat the enemy and cast out the demon. When Jesus descended the Mount of Transfiguration and approached the crowd that had gathered, the father explained the problem to Him. Jesus was grieved by the disciples' lack of faith and their spiritual weakness. Yet Jesus encouraged the father, "*If you can believe, all things [are] possible to him who believes*" [Mark 9:23].

It is important for us to remember that our lack of faith and our spiritual weakness actually grieve God. He wants to see us avail ourselves of this great power that He has made available to us. He encourages us that all things are possible to those who believe. Many of us can relate to the father's response, "*Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!'*" [Mark 9:24]. We want to ask God to increase our faith so that we can learn to appropriate this power to defeat the enemy. Interestingly, Jesus responded to the request to help the father's unbelief by demonstrating His power to defeat the enemy and casting out the demon. And all of the people present: the disciples, the religious leaders, the father, and the crowd were amazed at the majesty of God [Luke 9:43]

*"And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' So He said to them, 'This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting'"* [Mark 9:28-29]. Prayer and fasting are evidence of an intimate relationship with God. Our ability to concentrate upon God is related to consecration by God. Saying no to the pleasures of the world is saying yes to God.

During the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, religious people fasted one or two times a week. The Pharisee stood in the temple to pray and praised himself that he would fast twice a week [Luke 18:12]. Nevertheless, their prayers lacked power to defeat the enemy. Jesus effectively explained why in the Sermon on the Mount. He rebuked the hypocrisy of the religious people who fasted to draw attention to themselves for their piety, but who were not interested in drawing close to God [Matthew 6:16-18]. Since they were not fasting to draw close to God, they did not receive power from God to defeat the enemy.

On the other hand, the early church that met at Antioch sincerely sought God. They sought to minister to God as they worshiped Him, prayed, and fasted. As they sought God, God spoke and directed the church by commissioning Barnabas and Paul for the first missionary journey. They were able to hear from God because they had sought to separate themselves from the distractions of the world. The church continued to fast and pray, and they laid hands on Barnabas and Saul to recognize that they were being sent out by the Holy Spirit. As they were sent out with the power of the Holy Spirit, they defeated the enemy despite the enemy's efforts to hinder their mission.

Fasting is typically associated with abstaining from food. Nevertheless, we can appropriate God's power by drawing close to Him by abstaining from certain material pleasures. For example, you can say "no" to television so that you can say "yes" to God. By spending time praying and reading the Bible rather than watching television, we are in effect fasting. As we draw close to God, we appropriate His power, and the enemy is defeated.

## Chapter 21: The Power of God Displayed

God wants to display His power in and through the life of the believer so that He may be glorified. This principle is demonstrated in the life of the prophet Elisha.

Elijah was instructed by God to anoint Elisha as the prophet to succeed Elijah. Elijah found Elisha and commissioned him to follow and serve the man of God. It is interesting to consider that Elisha had material wealth and a comfortable life. In contrast, Elijah had fled from wicked Queen Jezebel and had been living in a cave. He was dirty, depressed, and discouraged [1Kings 19]. In light of these circumstances, why did Elisha follow Elijah?

Elisha saw the power of God displayed in Elijah's life, and he desired the same experience. Elisha followed and served Elijah faithfully. Then God revealed to the prophet Elijah that it would be his last day on earth. How would you spend your last day on earth if you knew for certain that it would be your last? Elijah went to strengthen the ministry students at the three schools of the prophets. Elisha traveled with Elijah, and at each stop, Elijah urged his assistant that he did not need to continue to follow. But Elisha promised he would not depart from Elijah. Finally, Elijah asked his servant what he desired. Elisha responded, *"Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me"* [2 Kings 2:9].

Elisha wanted more of God than most. Elisha's request for a double portion is often seen in relation to Elijah. It is noted that Elisha performs twice as many miracles as Elijah. But also, Elisha's request can be seen as relative to the school of ministry students. For example, if a Hebrew man had four children and sought to leave them an inheritance, he would divide the estate into five portions. The eldest son would receive two shares, and each of the other sons would receive a single share. The eldest son receives a double portion relative to the other sons. I believe that Elisha sought a double portion compared to the students at the school of ministry. Elisha was willing to cross the Jordan River and draw close to the man of God or the place where God was moving. The other ministry students loved God, but were not willing to go the extra mile to draw close to God. But because Elisha remained close to where God was moving, God did in fact grant his request for a double portion.

The display of God's power is seen in the outpouring of the double portion of God's Spirit. Our tendency is to focus on the many miracles performed by Elisha. Yet there is a subtle incident that may epitomize the power of God displayed in the life of the prophet Elisha. On one occasion, a woman was in great despair because her son had just died. Now when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet, but Elisha's assistant came near to push her away. But the man of God said, *"Let her alone; for her soul [is] in deep distress, and the LORD has hidden [it] from me, and has not told me"* [2 Kings 4:27]. Elisha was surprised that God had not revealed to him the reason for the woman's despair. Essentially, Elisha had walked so closely with God that he was used to hearing from God in a particularly intimate way.

I think many of us would be very excited to hear from God on one occasion, let alone regularly. Yet this was the reality of Elisha's life. What a blessing to be so close to God that we could hear

Him speak. This may be a greater blessing than being an agent for the miraculous. God wants to draw us close to Him in prayer so that we can hear Him speak, and display His power.

The power for Christian living and boldness to proclaim the good news concerning Jesus is displayed in us by God in response to our prayers. Jesus promised that we would be His witnesses when the Holy Spirit came upon us [Acts 1:8]. In other words, once we receive the power of the Holy Spirit, we will display Christ to the world. He instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were enveloped with power from on high [Luke 24:49]. The disciples responded by gathering to pray and continuing to pray until the Holy Spirit was given to the church at Pentecost [Acts 2].

The Holy Spirit transformed the disciples so that the power of God was manifest. Less than two months before, they had been afraid and had denied the Lord. Now they were boldly proclaiming Jesus and the truth of His death and resurrection. Fear was replaced by faith, and denial of Jesus was transformed into a display of Jesus. The religious leaders sought to silence the message of the church, but despite their threats, the church continued to proclaim the good news of Jesus the Messiah. The religious leaders were at a loss to explain the transformation: *"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus"* [Acts 4:13]. The disciples had not been trained or educated at the rabbinical schools. Yet they displayed an authority and boldness that was remarkable and was attributed to their training with Jesus and His presence in their lives.

The religious leaders continued to threaten the disciples in an effort to thwart their ministry. But the disciples continued to pray to God that His power would be displayed and that they would continue to speak God's word with boldness. *"And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness"* [Acts 4:31]. God delighted to respond to their prayers and display His power. The disciples were filled with the Spirit, and they spoke God's truth with boldness.

God wants us to have power for Christian living. The Apostle Paul describes the conflict between the flesh and the spirit in Romans 7 and 8. Paul observes how discouraging it can be when we don't do the things we want to do and when we do the things we don't want to do. He then proceeds to explain that we can have victory over the flesh because of the work of the Spirit of God within us. God wants to liberate us from the bondage of indwelling sin by enabling us to live the Christian life through the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling us.

The display of this power in the life of a believer or the lack of this power is observable to others. When Paul came to Ephesus, he asked believers whether they had received the Holy Spirit, when they had believed. Paul recognized that the power for Christian living was missing from their lives. As the believers at Ephesus received the Holy Spirit, there was a clear manifestation of the power of God. God will undoubtedly display His power in different believers in a variety of ways, but He will clearly manifest His power.



How do we receive this power? Jesus made clear that the power for Christian living is available as we pray and ask God for the filling of His Spirit: *"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if [he asks] for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will [your] heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"* [Luke 11:9-13].

The Holy Spirit is the source of power, and He is available to us if we ask God in prayer. The Spirit helps us to understand Jesus and experience the Christian life. As we receive the Spirit, we perceive spiritual truth and draw close to God. As we draw close to God, His power is displayed in our lives. Therefore, if we want to see His power displayed in our lives, we simply begin by praying and asking God to fill us to overflowing with His Spirit. This is the beginning of an intimate relationship with God that will develop so that His power is manifest in us. You will discover that as you draw close to Him in prayer His power will transform you. Then we will see Christ-like character: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and hope.

### **Power Study Guide**

1. How would you like God to demonstrate His power in your life through prayer? Write a prayer request to God asking Him to display His power in your life in that particular area.
2. Consider the lives of Elijah and Elisha. What did you learn about the power of prayer that you can apply to your life?

## Conclusion

In this study, we have considered what Jesus wanted to teach us about prayer so that we could have an intimate relationship with God. As Jesus gave the disciples a “Model Prayer” he was not trying to give them a formula or ritual for prayer, but he was seeking to demonstrate principles. As we have considered the principles, we have learned some of the benefits of prayer, and we have learned some practical wisdom about how to pray. But we have also learned that prayer is not an intellectual pursuit, but rather a spiritual pursuit. Accordingly, the purpose of the study is not to simply teach us to pray, but to equip us so that we can develop an intimate relationship with God through prayer. In other words, finishing a study about prayer has not been the goal, but actual fruitful prayer is the goal. Therefore, as you now continue to pray with new insight, intensity, and intimacy may God bless your fruitful prayer. Finally, remember we learn most about prayer by praying. So let’s start praying.

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