



Approaching with Confidence:

A Study of Prayer
and Fasting

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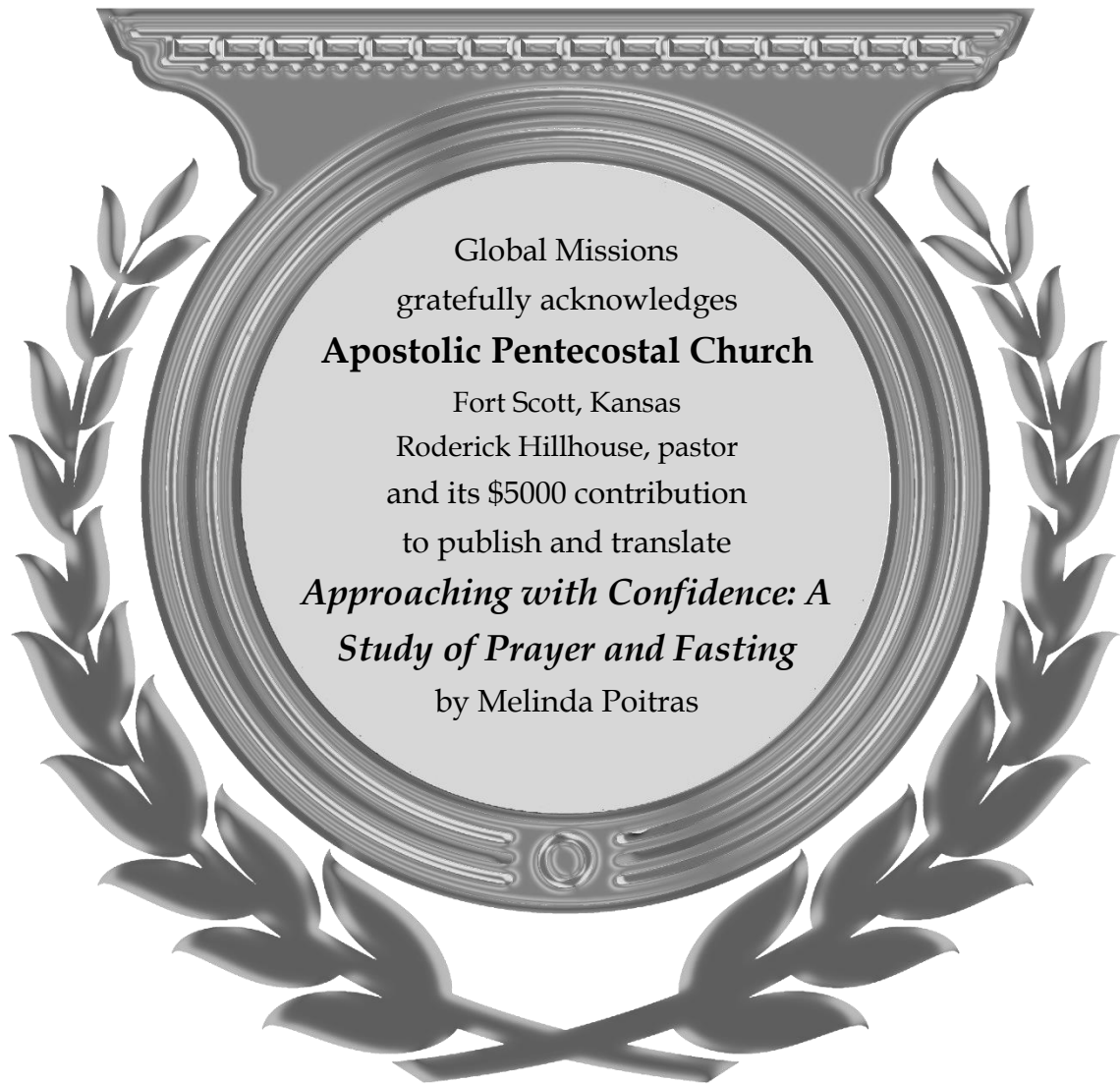


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Lesson 1

The Protocol of Prayer

KEY VERSE

“Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth”
(Psalm 54:2).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Clarify the essential ingredients of successful prayer
- Define *sacrifice* and *sacrament*

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

“How do you handle the protocol of it?” he asked me. Confused, I replied “The protocol of what?”

“Prayer, the exact and proper way that you go about approaching God so that you’re sure He will receive you. I know that people pray through the Tabernacle, and that there is a procedure for approaching Him. I just don’t know exactly what it is, and I don’t want to get it wrong.”

I was blown away that anyone would even ask such a question. I understand the Lord is to be respected and He is to be treated with reverence, but no saint of God should ever tie themselves up into knots worrying about how to approach Him. This is what the Bible says about those who seek God:

“For He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Skills Required

The Lord did not over complicate matters for us. What skills must you possess to approach God?

- 1.) You must believe that He is.
- 2.) You must believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

After you meet those qualifications, you just seek. Believe He will reward you and seek. Nothing is wrong with “praying through the Tabernacle” (looking at the model of how the Tabernacle is set up and letting each part represent a different type of prayer), but it is not necessary for you to be heard. The God of Heaven loves us so much that He became flesh and lived, breathed, and walked among us. He felt everything that we feel and was tempted in all the ways we are. With pain in every step, He trudged up the hill to Calvary and died for our sins.

The minute He died – the second there was that final exquisite exhalation of breath – the veil ripped in the Temple. No longer were we separated from the presence of God. No longer did we need a priest. All at once – if we believe that He exists and He will reward those who diligently sought Him – we can walk right in to His throne room.

With one breath, He annihilated hundreds of years of protocol and replaced it with His immediate, tangible, and personal presence. Whenever you are tempted to worry that you are not approaching God in the right way, that you are not following the proper procedure, or that you just haven’t been “holy enough” to enter His presence, bask in the following verses of Scripture:

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Now where remission of these *is, there is* no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, *having* our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised)” (Hebrews 10:16b–23).

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Sacrifice and Sacrament

Here’s what Merriam Webster’s dictionary says about two very popular religious words:

Sacrifice: an act of slaughtering an animal or person or surrendering a possession as an offering to God or to a divine or supernatural figure. [2378 *thysía* – properly, an *offering (sacrifice)*; an official sacrifice *prescribed by God*; hence an offering *the Lord accepts* because *offered on His terms*. <http://biblehub.com/greek/2378.htm>

Sacrament: a religious ceremony or act of the Christian Church that is regarded as an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual divine grace, in particular.

We don’t have to follow a twelve-step process or program as with Alcoholics Anonymous or other anti-addiction programs. We don’t have to pray a scripted prayer or do a choreographed dance. We can boldly approach the throne of grace because the Lamb that was slain for us became the only high priest we will ever need. Webster defines two of our religious words quite succinctly and we can know: *Our Lord is our sacrifice and our sacrament, in and of Himself.*

Secret Ingredients

What then, is the true protocol of prayer? If it is no longer about incense, holy water, slaughtered doves, and ceremony, what ingredients are necessary for a successful prayer life? We find the answer to this question in Psalm 54:2: “Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth.”

The three ingredients you need for a proper prayer protocol are as follows:

1. God
 2. Yourself
 3. Your words
- When a Roman Catholic priest stands to lead in mass, chanting his ritualized “Hail Mary’s” – that is prayer.
 - When a Pentecostal preacher lifts his hands in front of his congregation and brings their needs before the Lord – that is prayer.
 - When a grieving mother loses a child to war, and she is so angry and hurt she can’t think straight and she throws her head back and screams “Why?” straight into the heavens – that is prayer.
 - When toddlers gather around their lunch and recite their rhyming, habitual grace – that is prayer.

Conclusion

Prayer has no special ingredient, no particular requirement, and no list of hoops you must jump through. No outside force can judge you; no fear of failure should stop you. If there is someone to pray, someone to hear, and words – prayer is happening. God is always there to hear. The rest is up to us.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. What two skills must you possess to approach God?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____

2. What happened in the Temple the minute Jesus died?

3. Who is our high priest?

4. In your own words, define *sacrifice*.

5. In your own words, define *sacrament*.

6. List the three ingredients that you need for a proper prayer protocol.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Personal Study Notes

LESSON 2

The Art of Intercession

KEY VERSE

“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 22:30-31).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Define *intercession*.
- Explain the importance and effectiveness of intercession

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction: Is Intercession Effective?

The Lord let Abraham in on His intentions to destroy Sodom. Six times Abraham plea bargained with Him. Six times the Lord agreed and extended more mercy to the people of that wicked city. God was ready to destroy every single life in that town – yet Abraham intervened. (See Genesis 18.)

While Moses was on the mount of God, his people were creating their own god of gold below. Upon his return, his anger was kindled – and so was the Lord’s. The Lord was so angry He was set to destroy them in fury – yet Moses intervened. (See Exodus 25.)

The people, the animals, and the land itself thirsted for rain. Crops had failed; food was scarce; people were hungry. The prophet Elijah built his altar, placed the sacrifice upon it, and had it drenched with water. Then he lifted his voice and prayed, “Answer me that this people may know You!” A nation was perishing – yet Elijah intervened. (See I Kings 18.)

In Gethsemane, a broken and bruised figure prayed with all His might in the late hours of the night. He would not be in this world much longer, so He prayed for the disciples as they were sleeping. He asked God to grant them the full measure of His protection and His name. The disciples did not even know how desperately they will need these things – but Jesus intervened. (See John 17.)

Jesus intervened. He hasn’t stop:

“Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:34, NIV).

No one can say intercession is not important if Jesus Himself modeled it. And He did. Even as Satan accuses us, Jesus stands ready to defend us. He is ever in the gap, warring in intercession. He calls us to do the same.

Defining Intercession

The standard dictionary definition of *intercession* is “the act of intervening on behalf of another.” If a baseball is flying towards someone’s head and you reach out your hand and you catch it – that’s intercession. Lawyers in court rooms, people raising money on behalf of charity, the friend that steps into an argument to defend you – all these people are interceding. The English word is derived from the Latin *intercede*, meaning “to come between.” Intercession is standing in the space between someone and their ultimate punishment or deserved consequence.

“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not

destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 22:30-31).

In these verses, the Lord looked for someone to stand in the gap for His people and found no one. Thetus Tenney says, "The plan of prayer is God inviting man into partnership with Him to implement His word and will in the affairs of men. His justice demands judgment. His love seeks an intercessor to intervene."

God is a just God. He will stand by His word. He will punish those who disobey or wrong Him. However, He is also a loving and merciful God. He longs to be in a close and personal relationship with His people. He longs to know them and be known by them.

Sometimes, someone in your life might be incapable of being in relationship with God. Maybe their heart has become too hardened by the ways of this world. Maybe they have been too hurt or abandoned and no longer can trust. Maybe they are so committed to their life of sin, they have no desire to know Jesus. Perhaps they don't even want Him.

Under normal circumstances, they would be without hope. They would have no hope of knowing God or experiencing His touch, and they would be headed directly for death and destruction. This does not have to be the case, however. You can step in. You can stand between them and their doom and plea for the mercy of God to intervene. When that happens, what will God do? Let's look at God's response when we pray.

God's Response When We Pray

"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do *it*" (John 14:13-14).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give *it* to you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23-24).

“Ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:2b).

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

All we need to do is ask. For our lost family members, our struggling friends, those hurting in our church, the lost in foreign lands, all we need to do is ask. When we intercede, God will intervene.

Why We Intercede

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

“For this cause” equals “This is why.”

This is why we pray: So that Jesus, in all of His riches, would grant others the glory to be strengthened mightily in their spirits. That Jesus would dwell in their hearts by faith and that they could fully and completely comprehend His love. We stand in the gap, when we intercede. When we pray for others, we are giving them the opportunity to be filled with the fullness of God.

God’s law and justice dictate judgment and consequences. God’s love and mercy wait patiently for an intercessor to plead the case. God’s word is settled in Heaven. Our prayers bring them to reality in the earth. As we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” our prayers become the discipline training of our future ruling and reigning with Him.
– Thetus Tenney

God allows us a place in His will that only we can occupy. Our prayers affect the outcome of other people’s lives. God longs to partner with us to help

others live the best life possible. Holding His hand and through intercession, we can change the fate of the entire world.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. List at least three examples (with the reference) of a time when intercession saved someone's life.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

2. What was God looking for in Ezekiel 22?

3. Even as Satan accuses us, who is interceding for us?

4. What does God's justice demand?

5. What does His love seek?

6. Provide two Scripture references stating God's response to our prayers.
A. _____
B. _____

7. When we intercede, what will God do?

8. According to Ephesians 3, why do we pray?

Lesson 3

Why Pray?

KEY VERSE

“Pray continually” (I Thessalonians 5:17, NIV).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Understand the need for prayer
- Pray effectively

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

Why do we pray? Why do we even bother? To start with, the obvious should be stated:

1.) Pray because God commands it.

“Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (I Thessalonians 5:17–18).

We are commanded to pray because it is the will of God. Period. Full stop. The Lord tells us to, and we should do it. That alone should be enough in itself. However, prayer is not as one dimensional or as cut and dried as that. Prayer is vibrant and active, and other reasons exist why we should partake in it.

2.) Pray because others need us to.

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

This is one of the most beautiful passage of Scripture in the Bible to me, because I have experienced this first hand. When I could not clearly see the way that I should go, when I didn't know what would come next, when I was tired and weary, shattered to the core – I knew that God loved me. At the very time in my life when I should have had the most doubt over the constancy of that fact, I knew it beyond a shadow of a doubt, because someone was praying for me.

“For this cause” – *this is why* – I pray. So He would grant others glory, so they would be strengthened by His Spirit in the inner man, that He might dwell in their hearts, that they would be rooted and grounded in love and even understand (regardless of circumstance or situation or how they have been hurt in the past) the depth and height of the love of Christ. We can pray, and someone could receive assurance of the love of God that surpasses knowledge. We could pray, and someone could be filled with all the fullness of God. With power like that at our disposal, it would be almost foolhardy to fail to pray. Tap into the power at hand, pray because others need us to.

3.) Pray to be in the practice of it.

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4).

Abide. Merriam Webster defines that word as following: “continue without fading or being lost.” Synonyms for *abide* include, but are not limited to: *continue*, *remain*, *survive*, *last*, *stay*, and *persist*. How do we abide in Christ? How do we continue in His presence, remain in His hand, survive whatever comes our way, last longer than anyone else, stay when we feel like fleeing, and persist when things get difficult? We pray. Being in the practice of prayer is so incredibly important.

First, the more we know someone, the easier it is to understand what they are thinking and feeling. It is our desire to know and understand the mind of Christ, to hear His voice, to find His will for our lives. How are we to do that if we aren’t spending proper time with Him? Spending little time in prayer and expecting the Lord to communicate to you clearly is like attempting to have a conversation with someone while music is blasting through your headphones. They *are* communicating clearly, but the communication cannot reach you because you are not opening the proper channels. You must be spending time with the Lord if you ever expect to hear from Him clearly.

Another reason being in the practice of prayer is important is that the force of habit is a powerful thing. If you look at your life, you will begin to realize that it is full of patterns. When we are happy, we do the same dance. When we are sad, we likely eat the same comfort food. When we are upset, in distress, in trouble, or just needing a friend – we generally turn to the same one. We do this just out of habit; it is natural to call upon the person we are the closest to. Why not let that be Jesus? Why not let Him be the person that we lean on the most, the first person we want to tell our problems to? That can happen. A desire to speak to Him could be as natural as breathing – but not without practice.

When I had a traumatizing experience that knocked the breath out of my lungs and the strength out of my knees, I did not talk to the Lord because I was happy with Him. I didn’t talk to Him because I wasn’t confused or scared and I saw everything clearly, or even because there was a scriptural mandate that compelled me to. I cried to the Lord first because it was my habit to do so.

Jane Austen’s characters Elizabeth Bennett and Fitzwilliam Darcy have a conversation in her novel *Pride and Prejudice* that perfectly illustrates all I am trying to express:

“I certainly have not the talent which some people possess,” said Darcy, “of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I

cannot catch their tones of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done."

"My fingers," said Elizabeth, "do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I will not take the trouble of practicing. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution."

We hear so often that so and so is "such a good prayer warrior" or "such and such" just "seems to be able to get in touch with Heaven." The same spirit that is in those people is the spirit that is in us. If we want to be effective in prayer, it is merely imperative that we get into the practice of it.

4. Prayer will anchor you when nothing else can.

"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Sometimes, things happen that we do not understand. Angie Smith tells a powerful story about the encounter with God she had concerning Genesis 22. We read the story of Abraham and his son Isaac in the following verses:

"And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And

Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Genesis 22:7-14).

She spoke of how Abraham called the place "in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" or "on the mount of the Lord it will be provided." Abraham had been willing to sacrifice all and then called the place of the Lord's intervention "The place where God provides." She admitted that in many places in her life she did not seek to call "The place where God provides," including the cemetery where she goes to visit her youngest daughter. She shared how she would go to the cemetery and she would read and re-read the words of Genesis 22. The Lord would lay it upon her spirit again and again and again. She would read it repeatedly, never sensing anything new until one day she noticed something.

Verse eight states: "And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together."

And then in verse thirteen: "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."

She was struck with the realization that when Abraham was asked, he said nothing about a *ram* but merely said that there would be a *lamb*. He said with confidence that a lamb would be provided and thousands of years later, on that precise mountain range – it was.

"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

The spotless, perfect Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world. That means whatever happens, whatever comes, whatever we face – wherever we are that place is already called "the place where God provides," because He *always* provides a lamb. One hundred percent, absolutely, positively guaranteed. Every. Single. Time.

The Lord does not promise a ram will always be in the thicket. That isn't the point. He guarantees a lamb though. That is why prayer is so important. It takes our focus away from the thicket (our situations, our current lives, the things going on around us) and pulls it to the cross where it belongs.

I believe in the power of prayer to work miracles beyond a shadow of a doubt, but I also believe in the power of prayer to keep us when the miracle we have asked for doesn't come. Peace will keep our mind and heart in Christ Jesus if we will let it – if we will focus on the cross instead of the thicket and involve God in our daily life through prayer.

Because He has commanded, because others need us to, because we need to be in the practice of it, and because an anchor in the trials of life is absolutely imperative – pray. Pray without ceasing. He will not cease to be with you.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. According to I Thessalonians 5:17-18, what is the will of God?

2. According to Ephesians 3, what are some of the things our prayer can accomplish for others?

3. Define *abide*.

4. List some synonyms of the word *abide*.

5. What is the first reason the practice of prayer is important?

6. What other reason is the practice of prayer important?

7. If we want to be effective in prayer, what is it imperative that we do?

8. What did Abraham name the place where the ram was provided?

9. What are we promised even if a ram never shows up in our situation?

10. Our focus should not be on the thickets of our lives but rather on what?

Personal Study Notes

LESSON 4

Prayer Works

KEY VERSE

“Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (Acts 12:5, NKJV).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Show plainly that results come from praying
- Show that God answers prayer

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

In the Book of Acts, we find the story of Peter in prison. The church of Christ had been persecuted without mercy or end. The chapter begins with the death of James, the brother of John, and the subsequent arrest of Peter. In spite of the prayers they must have surely prayed, one of their beloved apostles had recently suffered a sudden and violent death. Nevertheless, the church gathered in an upper room to pray again.

“And Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5).

The church stood steadfast on the promise that “if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 18:19). They began to gather together in agreement that God would intervene in Peter’s situation.

“And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the LORD hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (Acts 12:9-11).

Just as quickly and as sincerely as they were asked, the prayers of the saints of God were answered. Even while the early Christians were praying together in one accord, the very thing they were praying for was walking down the street toward them.

“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, it is his angel” (Acts 12:12-15).

This is the part of the story where reality hits home. They gathered together, they stood on God’s Word, and they prayed without ceasing. They spent an intense amount of time sending forth an intense amount of prayer. Then when the

answer to the very prayers they were speaking showed up on their doorstep, *they do not believe it had happened*. When Rhoda told them their prayers had been answered, they accuse her of being insane. It's almost incomprehensible, for they were kneeling in prayer:

“Oh great and sovereign God. Please deliver Peter from prison.” Then Rhoda came and said to them, “Peter has been delivered from prison.” And they say, “You are crazy.”

Their prayers had been answered, yet they did not believe. They were not the first group of people to pray impossible prayers that they do not expect to have answered. They are not likely to be the last.

“But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place” (Acts 12:16-17),

“They were astonished.” That particular passage is the most telling. So often Christians ask for things in as much faith as they can muster, never fully finding the courage to believe beyond the shadow of the doubt that their prayers will be answered. Thankfully, God does not ask us to live lives void of any doubt whatsoever. If you have never struggled with your faith, then you might not be human. Scripture states, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” Matthew 21:22 is not limited merely to those who portray a mountain-sized store of faith believing. In fact, we are told that if we act on faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, the Lord will act on our behalf. (See Luke 17:6.) The Lord is well able to meet you exactly where you are and do whatever you ask in His name so that God might be glorified. (See John 14:13.)

Countless articles and books have been written and sermons preached on the topic “When Prayers Go Unanswered.” I don't believe there is any such thing. I believe that God answers every single prayer that we pray, every single time.

God Answers Prayer

God gives three different types of answers:

- 1.) "Yes" answers.
- 2.) "No" answers.
- 3.) "Wait" answers.

Yes

George Muller started an orphanage in England that eventually sheltered over ten thousand children. He was no stranger to the art of leaning on God and depending solely on Him for wealth and provision.

"The children are dressed and ready for school. But there is no food for them to eat," the housemother of the orphanage informed George Mueller. George asked her to take the 300 children into the dining room and have them sit at the tables. He thanked God for the food and waited. George knew God would provide food for the children as he always did. Within minutes, a baker knocked on the door. "Mr. Mueller," he said, "last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you. I will bring it in."

Soon, there was another knock at the door. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil by the time the wheel was fixed. He asked George if he could use some free milk. George smiled as the milkman brought in ten large cans of milk. It was just enough for the three hundred thirsty children" (*www.christianity.com*).

This is a beautiful example of an immediate "yes" answer from God. An amazing example of this can also be found in Joshua chapter 10. Joshua and his people were fighting an immense battle when Joshua realized he needed more time:

Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD ought for Israel" (Joshua 10:12-14).

The Lord heard the cry of His servant and responded with an immediate and resounding yes. That day the Israelites were given a mighty victory, for at the request of the man of God, Joshua, the Lord Himself fought for them.

No

Four-year-old Amy wished that her brown eye would turn blue like her mother's. "I know," she said one night. "I'll ask Jesus to make my eyes blue. Mother says that Jesus always answers." Amy knelt beside her bed and prayed earnestly that God would make her eyes blue; then she jumped into bed, certain that her prayer would be answered. In the morning, she eagerly jumped out of bed and looked in the mirror. Her eyes were still brown. Jesus had not answered! How sad and disappointed she felt. Then a little voice in her heart whispered, "Isn't *no* an answer?"

Years later Amy Carmichael went to India where God used her to rescue many children from a life of sin in the temples of that country. She stained her skin with coffee and wore Indian clothing. This enabled her to enter the temples to rescue the children without being detected as a foreigner. Because she had brown eyes, she was able to pass as a woman of India and was allowed into the temples. Then she was glad God has said *no* to her childish prayer for blue eyes. He knew what was best for her. (www.wordstoday.blogspot.com)

Amy Carmichael start Dohnavur Fellowship in India and during her lifetime, one thousand girls were saved from a life of poverty, slavery, shame, and despair. Today, over fifty years after Amy's death, the fellowship is still in existence and thriving with a working hospital, school, and sixteen nurseries. Four-year-old Amy would never have imagined that future for herself, but God already had it in mind when He said *no* to giving her the blue eyes she so desperately wanted.

Wait

In John 11:3, some very close friends of Jesus sent Him word that their brother (also one of His nearest and dearest friends) was desperately and deathly sick. Instead of rushing to their aid and appearing immediately at the side of their beloved brother, Jesus waited right where He was for two whole days. This meant that by the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus was already dead. When Jesus

approached the younger sister, Mary, she was completely beside herself with grief and disappointment.

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:32).

Jesus had waited too long to answer her prayer. Or had He? Here are some verses of Scripture referencing waiting on the Lord:

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

“Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14).

“And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18).

These are just three of the many verses of Scripture encouraging us to wait on the Lord and His promises. The Lord’s ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:9), but He always has our best interests at heart and His perfect plan plays out in His perfect timing.

“Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:41–44).

Conclusion

The Lord has a plan for our life. It is for our good, and it *will* ultimately prosper us. (See Jeremiah 29:11.) We must remain steadfast and confident in our trust in Him, knowing that He sees every tear, knows every circumstance, and answers every single prayer. *All* of our needs *will* be supplied according to His riches in glory. (See Philippians 4:19.) This is a promise He makes. The promises the Lord makes, we can rest assured He will keep.

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. What happens when two or more believers agree in prayer on a topic?

2. How did the believers in Acts 12 react when the answer to their prayer showed up on the doorstep?

3. How much faith must we have to receive an answer to our prayers?

4. What are the three kinds of answers we can receive to our prayers?

A.

B.

C.

5. How did the Lord answer George Muller's prayer?

6. How did the Lord answer Amy Carmichael's prayer?

7. How did the Lord answer Mary and Martha's plea that He come to them quickly and help their brother?

8. Quote one verse of Scripture pertaining to waiting on the Lord.

LESSON 5

Praying Daily, Part I

KEY VERSE

“Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always” (I Corinthians 16:11).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Model the daily habit of prayer
- Give practical instructions regarding prayer

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

Christians struggle with the concept of daily prayer. Reasons for this vary: life is busy, distracting problems arise, fatigue follows us, others vie for our attention, daily tasks must be completed, it's too hard to focus, we run out of words to say – the list is limitless. When we compare our relationship with God to the other vital relationships in our lives, the necessity of daily communication becomes of obvious importance. What if we only approached our spouse when we needed something from them? Would it be healthy for our relationships if we served them constantly, ironing their shirts, or changing their tires, or contributing to them financially but never sat down to have an intimate conversation with

them? How about if each time we began a conversation with our spouse, we walked around in circles and spoke like this: “Oh wife, oh great wife, whom I love and adore, thank you for being my wife. Oh wife, wife, wife. Yes. My wife.”

That doesn't make much sense on paper, and in real life it would be downright ridiculous. We would never treat our spouses this way, but it becomes easy in our Christian walk to treat the Lord in just the way I described. We put Him on the back burner, only approaching Him when we encounter a need that we know He can supply. “Thanks Lord, for all that You do. Here are some other things that I need.” We allow ourselves to get caught up in serving Him daily, in completing the tasks we feel He has given us for the furthering of His kingdom, but we neglect to stop and spend time in conversation with Him. Then, when we do stop to talk to Him, our conversation is often riddled with so many vague expressions of grandeur and repetitions of His great name that we say “Amen” without having really said much else of substance.

Relationships

That is not what a relationship should look like. That is not what a real relationship is. Not with our friends, our family, our spouses, and *definitely* not with our God. Few things demonstrate the type of communion we are to have with our God than the Book of Genesis. Relationships were born within its pages. Here we find the first relationship between man and wife, occurring simultaneously with the first relationship between God and man. In Genesis 3, the serpent had deceived Eve, and she had fallen into temptation, taking her husband with her. Then God showed up in verse 8, right on schedule. The Creator of the world focused all His attention on the Garden of Eden, coming as was His habit to walk with His children in the cool of the day.

In verse 9 comes the question that the guilty Adam and Eve had most been dreading: Where are you? God is omniscient. He knows all; He sees all. He knew exactly where they were. He wasn't looking for them because He had misplaced them, and they had slipped out of His line of vision. That was not the sort of question this was. No, He was not concerned with their physical location but by the condition of their hearts.

“We meet here every day and we walk in perfect communion. I know you fully and you know Me better every single day we walk together. Something has distracted your focus from me. Something has changed the condition of your heart

and your soul. Our blessed communion has been ripped. Where is your heart? Where did you go?"

Sin has been getting in the way ever since the first bite of the first slice of forbidden fruit. The Savior seeks us still. When we become distracted, when we are too busy, when we concern ourselves with commitment to His cause rather than communion with His Spirit, when He hold Him in a high and lofty position using vain and formal language rather than openly communicating with Him, He asks us the very same question. "Where are you? What is the condition of your heart toward Me?"

Every day, in many ways, He calls to us, He reaches for us, He pulls us from our place in this world and invites us into communion with Him. If we are serious about our relationship with Him, if we are honest about our need for His input in our lives, we will stop and will take the time to meet with the Lover of our souls. We will do it daily. We will do it often. Whatever stage you're in with the Lord, you can rest assured that He wants to meet you in the garden.

Just like a great novel, our relationships often play out in three specific stages.

The Beginning

"As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

Perhaps you are just starting out on your journey with the Lord. For the first time, you have realized that He is present, He is for you, and He is constantly pursuing your soul. Every moment spent in His presence feels like Heaven and you are so in love with Him that you seek His face and His attention all the time. This is an amazing place to be. It must not be taken for granted. You can capitalize on that in several ways, but here are two of the most important:

1. **Talk to Him.** In these moments when your relationship is so new, you must talk to the Lord at every turn. Pour out your heart to the one who has sought and won it. Share with Him your burdens, your desires, your thoughts, and your fears.

“I love the Lord, for He heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy. Because He turned His ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live” (Psalm 116:1-2).

2. **Listen for His voice.** The best way to get to know someone is to communicate with them and then listen to what they say. Meditate on His Word daily, open your heart and head to make available space for the sound of His voice. Spent time studying His thoughts and His ways. Receive everything you can in learning all about Him.

“Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears” (Ezekiel 3:10).

The Middle

Every day we choose: dark or light, wrong or right. We serve God or something else we have exalted as an idol. Love is more than an emotion. Our relationship with God, like every other relationship, is a series of choices.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

Our relationship with God requires constant upkeep, concentration, and care.

Maybe, like a couple sitting in a marriage counselor’s office, you are wondering where to even begin. Time and test might have worn at your relationship with the Lord until it’s hard to say where to start the restoration process. Worn out by the same old and tired routines that you’ve been practicing for year after year, it all seems exhausting and pointless. The Lord might seem far away.

The truth is, while you may have moved, God never did. He never has; He never will. He is always standing right beside you, waiting for you to pour your love and affection upon Him, waiting for you to return to your first love. You must do exactly that: return to your first love. There is no heart too damaged or damp that the fires of passion and desire for the Lord cannot be rekindled in it. If you have drifted from the Lord and fallen into a boring routine, you should do the same things you would do if this happened in your marriage.

1. **Remember where it all began.** Relive your first encounters with the Lord and His presence. Revisit all the memories of when He showered you with grace, blessing, or affection. Sit down, take out a pen and a piece of paper, and write down the top ten favorite moments that you have had with the Lord. These are the moments when His presence was so real that you felt that He was closer than breath, the moments that He stepped in and made a way when there was no way, the moments when no-one else saw you, no-one else noticed, and no-one else was there but He was there right beside you all along. When you take your mind back to the times when He was so real and so wonderful, you'll want to experience those moments again. A past encounter will no longer be enough. You'll remember all the reasons you fell in love with Him in the first place. You'll give Him glory for all the ways He's never failed.

"We have to pray with our eyes on God,
not on the difficulties."—Oswald Chambers

When we turn our eyes, heads, and hearts back to God we remember to love Him for who He is, not merely what He can provide for us.

2. **Rekindle the fire.** Set aside extended periods of time in your week that belong to just you and the Lord. Write it on your calendar and show up without fail or cancelation. Read with Him. Walk with Him. Have dinner alone with just yourself and His presence. Sing to Him. Ask His opinion about things. Spend time with Him, tell Him that you love Him, and ask Him to help you love Him more.

"Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A man is powerful on his knees."—Corrie Ten Boom

The End

Different than our relationship with friends, family, or spouses, our relationship with the Lord has a beginning and a middle, but never an end. First Chronicles 16:11 says that we are to seek His face always. This does not merely apply to the notion that we should pray without ceasing, but also references the joyous news that our relationship with our Lord and Savior will be without end.

We are to seek His face every day of our life, and on into eternity. When He says always, He means forever.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. List five reasons Christians struggle with daily prayer.
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
 - D. _____
 - E. _____

2. What book of the Bible demonstrates the type of communion we are to have with God?

3. What three specific stages do relationships often play out in?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____

4. What are two ways we can keep our relationship with the Lord alive and thriving?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____

5. Our relationship with God, like any other relationship, is a series of what?

6. What are two ways we can stir up or rekindle our relationship with the Lord?

A. _____

B. _____

7. How is our relationship with the Lord different from any other relationship?

8. When the Lord says “always,” what does He mean?

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 6

Praying Daily, Part II

KEY VERSE

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Model the habit of daily prayer
- Present modes of prayer and prayer tools

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

Throughout history great men have commented about the importance of planning. Here are just a few of them:

- “A plan is a list of actions arranged in whatever sequence is thought likely to achieve an objective.” – John Argenti
- “A man who does not plan long ahead will find trouble at his door.” – Confucius

- “Always plan ahead. It wasn’t raining when Noah built the ark.” – Richard Cushing
- “As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it.” – Antoine de Saint Exupery
- “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” – Benjamin Franklin
- “If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it.” – Abraham Lincoln

Mortal men are not the only ones who value planning. The Bible has some things to say about plans as well:

- “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans” (Proverbs 16:3, NIV).
- “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps” (Proverbs 16:9, NIV).
- “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?” (Luke 14:28, NIV).

Plans are important to every area of life. The Book of Daniel excellently showcases the importance of planning to pray and prayer. Daniel, a young Hebrew captive was brought into the king’s house and then arose to power. Not only did he rise, he rose to the top. Darius set one hundred and twenty princes over his kingdom. Over the princes, he set three presidents. Eventually one man was under the king but over them all in authority. Daniel pushed past rank, wealth, breeding, education, and politics to be promoted to the highest position of honor. Daniel, the Hebrew captive, led the kingdom.

It must not have made sense to the rest of the government officials that this could even happen, but Daniel 6:3 (NIV) states, “Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.” Harboring an “excellent spirit” is no easy feat. In fact, the only way that any human could ever accomplish such a goal is through the faithful practice of prayer. Later in the chapter, after some of the other officials involved in government convinced the king to sign an edict issuing a ban on prayer, this is recorded in verse ten:

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed,

giving thanks to his God, *just as he had done before*" (Daniel 6:10, NIV, emphasis added).

The practice of prayer is so important. When trials come and situations arise in our lives when we need help to stand for truth and what is right, the best asset we could possibly have is the backbone that comes with already being in the practice of prayer.

Daniel did not change his routine when trouble arose. He did not storm straight into a tailspin of panic. He did the same thing as he did before: he followed his prayer plan. His habit of prayer carried him before, during, and *through* his trial.

When to Pray

If we want to be set apart from our peers, if we want the strength to stand in adversity, if we want it to be said of us that we harbor an excellent spirit, we must get into the practice of prayer. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy. Prayer should be simple. It is defined as talking to God. It shouldn't be complicated, and it isn't. In fact, it would be the easiest practice we put in place in our lives *if we only remembered to do it*.

Too often prayer gets swept under the rug, placed on the back burner, bumped down the schedule to make room for something more important, or simply forgotten. One of the best ways to guard and protect your prayer life is to ensure a plan is in place for it. It should be a part of your life, a habit such as brushing your teeth or eating breakfast. Furthermore, it should be guarded and respected as a priority.

The Bible says, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). As we go about our daily lives it is important to live with intention. We are called to consider really that time is passing and use it in the wisest way possible. Part of doing this is planning a time to pray. Each day you should be coming before the Lord in a consistent fashion. We say that He is the most important person in our lives, but do we treat Him as such? The actual time that we pray is not so important as making time to do so every day.

Where to Pray

The Bible is full of examples of Jesus Himself praying. If God in flesh was putting this principle into practice, it is worth following. It is also worthwhile to note the manner which He practiced prayer. Take a closer look at what He did and where He went.

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you’” (Mark 1:35–37, NIV).

“Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night, He was there alone” (Matthew 14:22–23, NIV).

These are just two examples that recorded Jesus’ prayer habits. In them (and many others found in the Gospels), we see the importance of setting aside some time alone and finding a quiet place to pray. The wisdom of this habit does not apply to Jesus alone but to us as well. We are advised to create space to meet with God as well.

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father; who is unseen. Then your Father, who see what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6, NIV).

What to Pray

In Matthew 6 Jesus gave His disciples a mini-tutorial on how to pray. He began by stating where they should pray – in a private place, and then continued by informing them what they should *not* do:

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him” (Matthew 6:7–8).

In prayer, it is often easy to slip into vain repetition. Our minds become distracted and we begin to say the same thing over and over. This is not how the Lord would like us to pray. He wants us to be engaged and intentional, fully present in conversation with Him. In Matthew 6:9-13, the Lord continued to provide a model for the way we should approach prayer.

“After this manner therefore pray ye:

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name . . .

We begin prayer by acknowledging the sovereignty of God. We acknowledge who He is and His place of preeminence in our lives and the lives of others. *Hallowed* means “honored” or “holy.” We must fully recognize His holy name and give it the glory and the reverence it is due. All power is in His name. We acknowledge that to be true, right out of the starting gate.

“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven . . .

Before we spend even one moment in prayer asking for own desires, we must first ask for His kingdom to be built through us. We request that He work in the situation we are facing, not to offer us relief or grant us our desires but to use that to build His kingdom. We ask for His perfect will to be done in us, our family, our finances, and our dreams so that we might carry out His heavenly plan in our earthly lives.

Give us this day our daily bread . . .

After we have acknowledged that He is sovereign and after we have requested that His will be accomplished in and through us, then we bring our requests before Him. It is at that point that we can pour out our hearts concerning our situations and ask Him to be the provider of all that we need for this particular day.

“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors . . .

We are to bring our sins before Him, presenting our faults and our failures and leaning on Him for forgiveness. When we have done that, we can also present the struggles we are having with others to Him. He can help us to view His people with the mercy and compassion that He so freely gives to us.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil . . .

Life tests and tries us. We are bombarded day after day with temptations, trials, and little nagging things that try our patience. We must not be ignorant of these challenges but rather accept them as a part of life, praying for the Lord's help and wisdom to overcome the things we face. The God we serve is stronger than any struggle in our lives. With the strength He provides, nothing can defeat us. It is our job, though, to let Him help. To receive His strength, we must first surrender our desire to fight our battles on our own. It is His hand that will deliver us from evil – not our own.

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever . . .

We must acknowledge the fact that all belongs to Him. We can hand Him our past, riddled with failure, our present full of confusion and distress, and our future and all the dreams we harbor concerning it. We can hand Him any situation we are facing, any illness we are experiencing, and any need we have, knowing that He is going to take care of everything concerning us. The world we live in is His. The people we love are His. Even the problems we face are His problems too. He gets to deal with our issues, He gets to solve our problems, and He gets the glory.

“Amen.”

Amen simply means “so be it.” We end with a statement of trust. Trust that the God who sees, hears, and holds all, can handle whatever we've brought before Him. Trust that what He wills will be done in our lives. Trust that even when we cannot see solutions and we live out our days less than satisfied with our current circumstances, He has everything in our lives under control. Then, we submit. Whatever He wants – so be it.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. Copy at least one quote about the importance of planning.

2. What is a verse of Scripture that illustrates the importance of a plan?

3. Which passage of the Bible details Daniel's plan for prayer?

4. Why is having a plan so important to our prayer life?

5. What example did Jesus model for us concerning where to pray?

6. What did Jesus teach His disciples concerning how *not* to pray?

7. According to the Lord's prayer, how should we begin our own prayers?

8. According to the Lord's prayer, how should our prayers end?

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 7

Modes of Prayer

KEY VERSE

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thessalonians 5:16–18, NIV).

LESSON OBJECTIVE

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Encourage the daily habit of prayer by presenting different modes of prayer:
 - P.R.A.Y
 - Prayer Clock
 - Hand Model
 - Praying Through the Alphabet
 - Prayer Journal
 - Sync to a Soundtrack
- Enjoy the power of prayer by using the suggested modes of prayer.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

Ask any Christian what one of the greatest struggles of their Christian walk is and they will tell you, finding the will of God. Books have been written, songs have been composed, messages have been prepared, retreats have been planned, seminars have been organized – often and with consistency – toward finding the answer to that one age old dilemma: “What is God’s will for my life? Should I go there or stay here? Should I marry this woman or should I end our relationship? Should I continue my education or quit school to become a missionary? Should I build up my worldly storehouse with economic goods to bless and build God’s church or should I sell all my possessions and live in a leper colony? Should I become a singer or speaker or does the Lord want me to serve in an orphanage instead?”

Life is a series of steps and choices. Far too often, the roadmap we would like to be is not there. Even if it were, we would have no idea where it was taking us. Life with God sometimes feels like a journey, destination unknown. Part of this is purposeful on His part. He wants us to learn to lean on Him. He desires us to trust His heart and rest in His hand, simply taking the next right step He calls us to. He does not leave us directionless though, no matter how tempting it may be to view life that way. He gives us spiritual authority to speak into our lives, His Holy Spirit to prick our hearts, and the black and white print of His word to offer us clear and sound direction.

We may not know what the exact and final “will of the Lord” is for our family, friends, finances, and future all at once and at any given time, but some things are outlined clearly in His word for us. A few times in Scripture the will of the Lord is laid out directly and clearly stated in plain English for us. One of those passages is in I Thessalonians. It says: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Every morning when you wake up, no matter how uncertain all else might seem, you can know absolutely beyond the shadow of a doubt that the will of God for your life is to rejoice and be thankful, praying continually. This is the will of the Lord for your life. That you pray. That is something you can know for sure. As a bonus, it’s a certain action you can take that will bring clarity to the other things you are testing out, questioning, and trying to accomplish.

What's His Will?

It is the absolute will of God that we pray continually.

It's a truth that is good to know, but do we apply it to our lives? Don't worry that you're not praying as fervently as you should. Don't stress that your prayers are not eloquent enough. Don't be afraid that you are not as skilled in the department of prayer as others are. If you're going to be dismayed about any area of your prayer life, perhaps look at the frequency with which you are praying. How much time are you spending in prayer? Could it be considered anywhere near "continual?" If not, then you are not in line with the will of God for your life, and something must change.

How Is that Accomplished?

The will of God for our prayer lives will only ever be accomplished through consistent and concentrated purposeful determination. We must look at our prayer lives and prioritize them to fit His plan for our lives. Climbing into your closet, shutting the door, and talking to God is not only a good idea, it's a biblical one.

However, if you're anything like me, once you're in the closet in the silence so many other things begin to war with our head and our heart. It's far too easy to run over the day's "to-do" list or even consider re-organizing our shoe selections.

Prayer should be the easiest thing in the world, but everything around us wars for our time, our energy, our attention, and our focus. A prayer life is accomplished by putting intentional effort toward that goal. One can employ many tools and tactics to have a more successful and focused prayer life. Just with a little bit of effort and thought, you can begin to live smart, with the same amount of intentional application you could "pray smart" as well.

Use the Alphabet

When you're struggling to focus in on in the Lord during prayer, it can be helpful to praise through the alphabet. This is done by mentioning an attribute of the Lord for every letter in the alphabet. For example: "Lord you are **A**lpha and **O**mega, **B**eginning and the end, thank **Y**ou for being so creative in all of **Y**our ways. You are absolutely **d**ivine and **e**verlasting. I praise **Y**ou because **Y**ou last

forever. You are **g**ood and **h**oly, **i**ncredible in all You do. You are **J**esus who saves me, the **K**ing of Kings, the **L**ord of Lords, with **m**ajesty that **n**ever ceases to amaze. **O**nly You can satisfy. **P**rince of Peace, the answer to all of my **q**uestions, You are my redeemer and my salvation. In a world of uncertainty, You are the **t**ruth. You **u**nderstand me completely. You are **v**ast; You are **w**onderful. I could exclaim Your attributes all day long. Your promises are certain. They are **y**es and **a**men. You rule in **Z**ion, please rule the kingdom of my heart. Have Your perfect way in all that I do.”

Praising through the alphabet pulls in your thoughts and challenges you to focus. Another variation of this practice is to pick on letter of the alphabet and list as many attributes beginning with that letter as you can. Example: Lord, you **a**mazing, **a**stounding, **a**stonishing, **a**ll I want, **a**ll I could ever need, **a**wesome, the **a**nswer, the **a**ntidote to what **a**ils me.

P.R.A.Y

Another way the alphabet can be used to incorporate prayer focus is through the P.R.A.Y acronym.

- **P-Praise.** Begin with thanking the Lord for all He has done. Not with petition, but with praise and gratitude for who He is.
- **R-Repent.** Take this next segment to bring your faults and failing before Him. Ask Him to convict you of any wrong doing and to cleanse your heart.
- **A-Ask.** After acknowledging and thanking Him for who He is and preparing your heart with repentance and humility, then bring your needs and your petitions before the Lord. Only after you have acknowledged His place of sovereignty and your place of humility should you ask Him to bless you.
- **Y-Yield.** Take some time at the end of your prayer to listen to His voice. Incline your ear toward His heart to hear what He has to say to you, and when you hear it, surrender.

Hand Model

A simple model for remembering what to pray is to use your own hand. When you place your hands in “prayer pose” (in front of you with the palms touching), you can look down at them and immediately focus in on what to pray for.

The thumb will be the finger closest to you. This represents prayer for those who are closest to you as a person. Your family, and your close friends should be the topic of this prayer. The pointer finger is next. It represents all those who point you in the right direction. Your teachers, preachers, mentors, doctors, police men and so on. The middle finger is the tallest, so it represents those who are in authority over your nation and in the government. The fourth finger is the weakest, let it remind you to pray for those who are weak: the sick, the orphaned, the widowed, the poor. These are the people who should garner your focus during this segment. The last finger is the smallest, and represents you. Only after prayer for everyone else should you begin to focus on yourself and your own needs.

Prayer Clock

Another tool that is incredibly useful in maximizing your prayer time is the prayer clock. (See last page of this lesson.) This divides different segments of time into different modes of prayer and you change topics as they correspond with the clock. Everything happens in five-minute increments. You start with five minutes of praise and work your way around surrender, confession, Bible-based prayer (praying Scripture), watching (holy alertness), intercession, personal petition, remembering blessings, worship in song, pondering spiritual themes, and true fasting (which is listening). After the full hour has passed, you end just as you began—with praise. The prayer clock can be shortened or lengthened to fill your allotted segment of time with an edifying mixture of praise, waiting, confession, scripture praying, watching, intercession, petition, thanksgiving, singing, meditating, and listening.

Prayer Journals

Keeping a journal can be an extremely helpful tool in the realm of prayer—especially if you are a writer. Within its pages, you can record written prayers, miracles that happened for you on particular days, and moments of grace and mercy that you are thankful for. In fact, keeping a list in your journal of all the things you are thankful for is an excellent way to meditate on the Lord and His goodness. Even if you are not prone to writing, a written account of all your needs and how God met them is a most inspiring thing to look back on in days of trouble.

One tip is to divide the pages down the middle. On one side write your needs and the details of your life situation. On the other, record how God met

those needs or intervened in those moments. It is also helpful to note the words people have prayed and spoken over you, or the promises you have received from God. When the Lord whispers to your heart, write it down. When you make commitments to Him, write them down. When He answers your prayers, or makes a way straight through the midst of your impossibilities – write that down.

Not only does writing require conscientious effort and therefore pull your focus in to what matters, but also it is incredibly helpful in a dry or weary season to remind yourself of all the ways the Lord poured out blessing and favor on your life in the past, as You trust Him to do the same with your future.

Sync to a Soundtrack

In this digital age, almost everyone has the means to take music with them wherever they go. Create a playlist and assign certain topics to certain songs. If you have the capability to mix the songs up, do so. You will enter the flow of prayer unhindered and uninterrupted by so much as the inconvenience of having to look up at your own list if you know automatically that when “Let it Rain” by Michael W. Smith plays, you pray for revival, or when “Lord You Are Good” by Israel Houghton begins, you switch to thankfulness to the Lord for all His provision. Music can inspire you to keep praying and touch your heart while reminding you of the things you need to be praying *for* at the same time.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. What is one thing we know with certainty is God’s will for our lives?

2. How will God’s will for our prayer lives only be accomplished?

3. Explain how to use the alphabet prayer model.

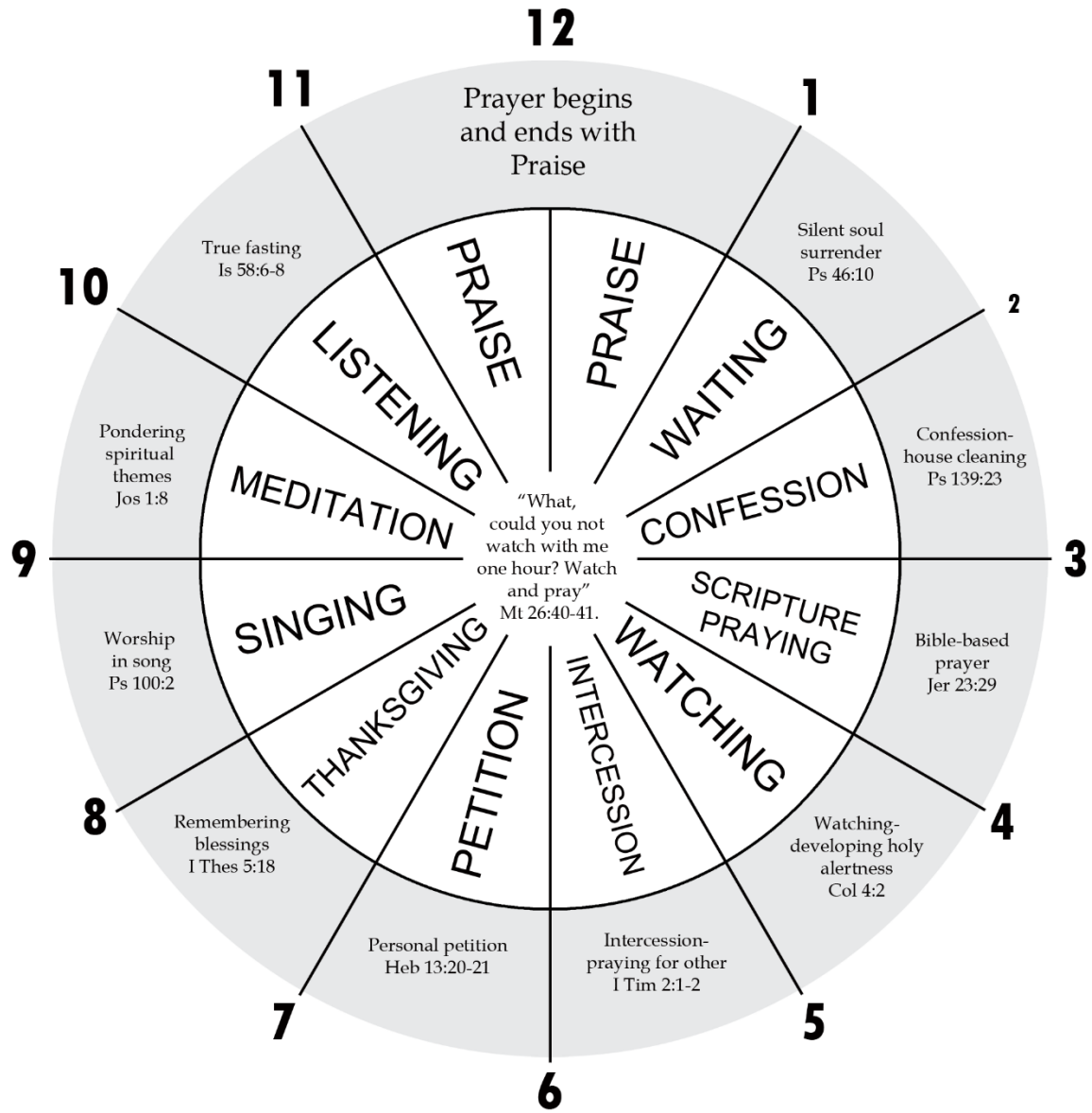
4. What does each letter of the P.R.A.Y. acronym stand for?

5. What does each finger of your hand stand for when using the hand model?

6. How does the prayer clock work?

7. What are some benefits of using a prayer journal?

8. How can you could incorporate music into your prayer life?



Adapted by Dorsey Burk, June 2017

Lesson 8

Examples of Prayers

KEY VERSE

“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Encourage the daily habit of prayer by presenting different modes of prayer:
 - Jabez
 - Jehoshaphat
 - Hannah
 - Habakkuk
 - Scripture Praying
- Experience the joy of prayer by using different forms of prayer.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

Imagine with me that your best friend's birthday is coming up. You have promised your friend that you are going to throw them the biggest, most lavish birthday party imaginable. They insist this is not necessary, but you stick to your promise on this one—you will throw them a party and it will be wonderful and worthy of them and all the joy they supply to your life.

You realize the importance of honoring your friend with this party. You fully intend to honor your friend with this party. Every day when you wake up, you think about things that you could do to honor your friend at the party. You have many valid and wonderful ideas, but you never actually plan anything. You pick out the invitations that you want—but you never send them to the printers. You make a list of people to invite—but you never invite them. You find the recipes that you want to make and have a full menu prepared—but you never actually cook the food. The theme, the decorations, the colors are all chosen—but you never take them out of the box or hang them up to begin decorating.

If you have a heart full of good intentions and a head full of good ideas, but your hands never do anything, what have you actually accomplished? No matter how badly you wanted to throw your friend a party, they will arrive to an empty, undecorated house if you never do anything to prepare. No matter how many great ideas you have, none of them are going to amount to anything if you never implement them.

The Bible says we should be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18). A quick search for the definition of the word *alert* yields these results: “a condition of heightened watchfulness or preparation for action.” When it comes to our prayer life, we are not to take a wishy washy or lazy approach. We are called to be alert and ready for action, vigilant and watchful. We are not to be just sitting by the side lines of the spiritual realm, but taking an active and actual part of involvement in the things of the Spirit.

Prayer Is a Battlefield

“For we wrestle not against the flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness in this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

The Bible makes it clear a war is going on for our souls, and those of our family, friends, and the rest of our sphere of influence. We are to be alert in the act of prayer, because prayer is the way we fight this spiritual battle. We are fortunate in the fact that we have been given many biblical examples of prayer “generals.” (Generals are defined as commanders in the army or officers of high rank.) These “generals” show examples of prayer modes that we could follow.

Jabez

The Prayer of Jabez is an inspirational best-seller by Bruce Wilkinson. The book is based entirely on I Chronicles 4:10: “Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, ‘Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.’ And God granted his request” (NIV).

In the verse prior, the Bible states that his mother called him Jabez because she “bore him in pain.” Names were important in biblical times so, from the beginning, Jabez’s existence was to be linked with pain. He was an honorable man, and wishing to be spared from a destiny forever linked to suffering, he simply cried out to God and asked Him for what he wanted. We too can go before the Lord and ask Him to bless us, to enlarge our territory (to widen our circle of influence), to keep His hand on us, and, yes, even to free us from pain. If you need something from the Lord, follow the direct example of General Jabez and just ask!

Jehoshaphat

“Lord of our ancestors, aren’t you the God in heaven? You rule all the kingdoms of the nations. You possess power and might, and no one can oppose you. Didn’t you, our God, force those who were living in this country out of Israel’s way? Didn’t you give this country to the descendants of your friend Abraham to have permanently? His descendants have lived in it and built a holy temple for your name in it. They said, ‘If evil comes in the form of war, flood, plague, or famine, we will stand in front of this temple and in front of you because your name is in this temple. We will cry out to you in our troubles, and you will hear us and save us.’ The Ammonites, Moabites, and the people of Mount Seir have come here. However, you didn’t let Israel invade them when they came out of

Egypt. The Israelites turned away from them and didn't destroy them. They are now paying us back by coming to force us out of your land that you gave to us. You're our God. Won't you judge them? We don't have the strength to face this large crowd that is attacking us. We don't know what to do, so we're looking to you" (II Chronicles 20:5-12, NIV).

The Bible says that when Jehoshaphat found out a vast army was approaching his kingdom, his immediate response was the emotional reaction of alarm. That was the first thing that he felt. The first thing that he did was purpose to pray and to send his nation on an immediate fast. He began his prayer by reminding himself of who God is and all He is capable of. He mentioned the Lord's exploits in the past and remarked that he had purposed, no matter what troubles come, to cry out to the Lord who hears and saves.

Yes, trouble was on the way there, but Jehoshaphat acknowledged that the management and vanquishing of it does not lie in his hands. He told the Lord that he doesn't know what to do, so he was looking to Him.

How did that story end? The Lord gave His people victory. When you are a child of God, that's how it always ends. When trouble comes to break down your door, trouble beyond anything you have previously imagined, and you are alarmed or dismayed, your physical reaction should be to pray to the God you serve, reminding yourself of His goodness and His provision in the path.

Hannah

"Then Hannah prayed and said: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and

he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness. It is not by strength that one prevails; those who oppose the Lord will be broken. The Most High will thunder from heaven; the Lord will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed" (I Samuel 2:1-10, NIV).

This is the prayer of a woman whose supplication had been answered. Hannah longed for a child so much that she went into the Tabernacle and prayed with such fervency that the priest thought she was drunk. Every fiber of her being longed for a child, so she went into the house of God and she asked for one. She put all her passion and all her energy into asking for the one thing that she desired. When God granted her request, her immediate reaction was to rejoice – not in the fulfillment of her longing, but in the Lord. She knew, as she said, that it is “not by strength that one prevails” but by the Lord doing a work in and for them. When you are faced with a need in your life, follow the example of General Hannah and pray until you breakthrough. When you do, pray again, with a thankful heart.

Habakkuk

The following prayer consists of excerpts from Habakkuk 3:

“Lord, I have heard your reputation. I have seen your work. Over time, revive it. Over time, make it known. Though angry, remember compassion. . . . [God] stops and measures the earth. He looks and sets out against the nations. The everlasting mountains collapse; the eternal hills bow down; the eternal paths belong to him. . . . Though the fig tree doesn't bloom, and there's no produce on the vine; though the olive crop withers, and the fields don't provide food; though the sheep is cut off from the pen, and there is no cattle in the stalls; I will rejoice in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of my deliverance. The Lord God is my strength. He will set my feet like the deer. He will let me walk upon the heights” (Habakkuk 3:2-19, CEB).

Habakkuk, in his time of need, approached the Lord with total confidence. This is more than being thankful after the need has been supplied, this is joy before

it ever happens, because he knew already that his God is going to come through. When you come before the Lord in prayer, be like General Habakkuk, resting in complete trust that the Lord will do all He has promised. Trust like that has you rejoicing before the miracle ever happens.

Battle Plans

Priscilla Shire's book *Fervent* is a systematic guide to designing and praying verses of Scripture over yourself, your loved ones, and the lost. The concept of the book is to acknowledge that we are in a spiritual battle. If that is so, then prayer is warfare, and we should treat it as such.

Priscilla Shire also starred in the major motion picture "War Room," which furthered this idea. In it, a young real estate agent meets an older woman who teaches her that the spiritual realm is a battlefield. That just as generals will meet in a war room to plot out strategies for battle, we can plot out strategies for battling in prayer by using Scripture. This thought out, pre-meditated, focused tactic can be a powerful tool in your prayer life. All you do, is think of a topic that you would like to pray for, and turn to your Bible to infuse it with the promises of Scripture.

Here is an example of a Scripture prayer on the topic of the family:

"You are a healer, a restorer. I thank You that You are working everything out for our good. Lead us into mending brokenness in our families and giving us the tools we need to do it (Colossians 3:12-14). Strengthen us as a single unit and let us not grow weary but increase in power (Isaiah 40:29). Let our lights shine bright all around us so we can lead others to You (Matthew 5:16). Heal our emotional wounds, Lord. Just as You took those stripes upon Your back, heal our hearts and minds (Psalm 147:3).

"Help us to truly love the way that You love us unconditionally (Romans 13:10). You help us understand, Lord, and Your will is perfect. There's always going to be challenges in our lives, but You will never abandon us (II Corinthians 4:8-9). I pray to always be in Your perfect will. That in our families the children would be obedient and the parents aligned to Your will. Training up their children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6). We want to

honor you and build a legacy of faith and trust in You within our families for generations to come.”

Take your requests before God. Do it boldly. Do it with intention. Believe that He will answer you. Maintain a spirit of thankfulness. Never be deceived as you go about what appears to be a normal, physical, everyday life. You are a part of a war. Prayer is a battlefield.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. What does it mean to be alert?

2. Why are we to be alert in prayer?

3. Which four “generals” should we allow to be our examples in our prayer lives?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

4. How might we pray like Jabez?

5. How might we pray like Jehoshaphat?

6. How might we pray like Hannah?

7. How might we pray like Habakkuk?

8. What is a “war room?”

9. What should we infuse our prayers with to be the most effective?

Lesson 9

Intercession

KEY VERSES

“On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isaiah 62:6–7, ESV).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Define *intercession*
- Demonstrate the need for intercession.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

A family stands in front of their house as flames threaten to consume it. The heat is unbearable, and the sobbing mother knows that her baby is trapped on the second floor. Within seconds the firemen are there, strategizing, preparing for, and carrying out a rescue. One returns the baby to the arms of its family as the rest extinguish the flames. Thank God someone intervened.

A dreadful car accident leaves a husband cognizant of his surroundings as his wife struggles for breath, unconscious. He has the use of all his limbs and faculties and he exists in a suspended state of panic. He stays right by her side – on the street, in the ambulance. He follows the gurney carrying her limp body down the long hospital corridor until she disappears into a surgical wing. He can do nothing more but pray as he sits alone in the hospital waiting room, struggling to understand each medical update and sipping stale coffee. Eventually a doctor informs him she is stable, that his wife is still with him. Thank God someone intervened.

She sits alone and stares out the window. She has lived a full life. She was a hard worker, a loving mother, a devoted friend. All her close friends have gone on to glory, as well as the husband she loved with her whole heart. Her children love and appreciate her, but they are scattered across the country, consumed with their own lives, spouses, and children of their own. They try to visit on special holidays and whenever business brings them into town, but for the most part, she spends her days alone.

She turns at the sound of a knock on the door. Her face brightens as she makes eye contact with the teenagers from the local youth group. They visit once a week, casting light on her days and bringing joy to her weary heart. Many a week, these visits are the only break in the monotony of her existence, someone else's grandchildren the only visitors she will get. She would be completely alone without them. Thank God someone intervened.

He rushed home with his report card. The last months had been less than exemplary, and for as long as he could remember he has struggled with basic math. His single mother has had all she can handle just putting food on the table and keeping him in school. She worked long shifts at a diner and arrived home almost too exhausted to speak. He was used to doing the laundry. He was used to making dinner. And his teachers were used to his poor performance. That was before Miss Johnson began taking the extra time to tutor him in math. She stayed an hour after school with him every day, and he had gone up two letter grades in the span of a semester. There would be no hiding this report card. Thank God someone intervened.

Intercession Defined

As humans, we are no stranger to struggle. All of us have faced it at one point or the other. In our lives situations—mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual—will arise that we are not capable of handling on our own. This is why we have the body of Christ, to come along side us and strengthen us when we have no will or means to go on. Intercession can effectively help us in each are of struggle. We are called to look out for each other. Literally:

“On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isaiah 62:6-7, ESV).

We should be watchmen in the lives of our friends and family. Remind the Lord of their plights and problems continuously, without thinking of rest for ourselves. God is constantly looking for people to intervene in the lives of others:

“I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one” (Ezekiel 22:30).

The Lord who created Heaven and earth is certainly capable of choosing to do things like provide bread or bind wounds or create walls, but He gives us free will and choice, inviting us into the process. He created us to care for one another in the things we do, the things we say, and by using the prayers we pray in intercession to intercept the plans of the enemy.

Intercession is defined simply as “the action of intervening on behalf of another.”

Intercession as a Spiritual Gift

The website Missionaries of Intercession points out that many view intercession as a spiritual gift though it is not mentioned specifically in the spiritual gift listings. We find the lists of spiritual gifts in four different places in the Bible.

- 1.) “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak

as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability with God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (I Peter 4:10-11).

- 2.) "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12).
- 3.) "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:6-8).
- 4.) "For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the work of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (I Corinthians 12:8-11).

The "gift of intercession" is not mentioned anywhere within these verses. However, this does not mean that intercession is not a spiritual gift. When we intercede, we use many of the other gifts listed. We are all supposed to pray; it is a commandment of God. However, some people find themselves able to pray for longer periods with greater ease. They seem to have a natural affinity for the gift of intercessory prayer. It just comes easier to them. These are the people who harbor the gift of intercession.

We are all compelled, for example, to pray for the sick so they might be healed. You will find some people have an easier time of channeling the faith necessary to allow the Lord to accomplish healing through them. These people are said to have the gift of healing. We are all commanded to be evangelists, but some people love to evangelize and accomplish it with greater ease than others. These people are said to have the gift of evangelism. We are all commanded to do certain things for the kingdom of God but have been given certain talents and giftings in the spiritual realm (as well as the natural) to aid us in our specific life course and calling.

Intercession, at its most base definition, is praying for others. The gift of intercession then, would enable you to do that at a more intense, passionate, relentless rate and level than others. How do you know if you have the spiritual gift of intercession? Well, as the saying goes, “the proof is in the pudding.” “The sign of the gift is the fruit of its use.” Many lists are available, detailing signs of the gift of intercession and the fruit of its use. This one, from missionariesof-prayer.com, is a list of qualities someone with the gift of intercession might display:

- You have a deep concern for others who may be walking in a sinful path
- You have a deep concern for certain regions or areas that others don't seem to notice. Do you know someone who is constantly asking you to pray for something that you don't feel a particular interest in? For example, they always want to pray for the government. Not that this is not an important area to focus on but this is their constant request. That is usually a sign that they have been given the assignment from the Lord to pray for the government.
- You have compassion to the point of tears for persons or places that have no direct connection to you.
- You have knowledge about persons or places that are not directly connected to you.
- You have an ability to relate to people or places that are not directly connected to you.
- You get lost in prayer and can pray much longer than most.
- The first thing that you do or think when you hear about a problem is pray.
- When you pray words come out of your mouth with information that you didn't know you knew.
- You are very sure within your heart that when you pray for certain things the prayer is being answered instantly.
- You exercise more faith than others for miracles in prayer.
- You are happy to pray for others and consider it an honor that they would ask you.
- You sometimes experience an emotional or even physical pain for others when praying for them.
- The most important trait is that things happen or answers to prayers come very fast when you pray.

If the majority of these things seem to describe you, then you are likely gifted with the natural ability to intercede.

Is the Spiritual Gift of Intercession Necessary?

Without a doubt, the spiritual gift of intercession is a vital and powerful weapon in the kingdom of God. It is necessary to the success of the church. It is not necessary, however, for you to have the spiritual gift of intercession to intercede for the church.

Take the phrase we mentioned earlier: “The proof is in the pudding.” What this phrase means is that the outcome of an endeavor will determine how well it was accomplished. A cook might have in her head all the ingredients to make a fabulous pudding. It can look good on paper, smell heavenly, and stand out on the dining room table as a thing of beauty, but only the tasting will tell exactly what kind of pudding it is. The proof is in the results.

Now, a famous chef is obviously able to head into the kitchen and whip up a spectacular pudding. However, he is not the only one with the ability to do so. Anyone with a recipe would be capable of doing it. Sure, it might take a little longer and be a little messier, but anyone who can follow instructions and possesses the ingredients can make a pudding. The result of carefully followed instructions, in fact, is likely to be the same.

Intercession is like that. Some may possess more levels of natural skill in prayer, but everyone is capable of having a vibrant, effective, and impactful prayer life. In fact, every believer may not be gifted with the natural talent for intercession, but every believer is given some solid help in the prayer room:

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

Conclusion

Just like making a good pudding would require us to get in the kitchen and practice, becoming a successful intercessor requires us to get into the prayer room and practice as well. Pray over the items listed in the spiritual gifts segment. If we are not easily touched by the needs of others, pray that the Lord would soften our heart. If we are often distracted when we attempt to have a time of prayer, pray that the Lord would narrow our focus. If we lack skill—just ask Him. He is

standing by to bless us, and He blesses us so that we might be more of a blessing to others.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. In what four areas do Christians struggle?

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

2. What verse of Scripture commands us to literally “look out” for the wellbeing of others?

3. What is a simple definition of *intercession*?

4. List some qualities that someone possessing a natural (God given) ability in the realm of intercession might display.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

5. Is the spiritual gift of intercession necessary? Why?

6. Is it necessary for us to have the spiritual gift of intercession in order to intercede?

7. Who will help us in our time of intercession?

Lesson Ten

A Formula for Prayer

KEY VERSE

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (I Timothy 2:1).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Reinforce the importance of intercession
- Showcase a biblical example of successful intercession

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

A Hebrew lexicon is informative. It tells us the Hebrew word for “intercession” is *paga*. It is defined as follows: to encounter, meet, reach, entreat, make intercession. The verb is used in both its basic meaning (1. To meet, light upon, join; 2. To meet out kindness; 3. To encounter, fall upon with hostility; 4. To encounter, entreat or request; 5. To strike, touch a boundary) and in its causative form (1. To cause to light upon; 2. To cause to entreat; 3. To make entreaty, interpose; 4. To make attack; 5. To reach the mark). A lexicon also tells us that the

King James Version of the Bible uses some variation of the word forty-six times in the Old Testament.

The English word *intercession* is derived from the Latin *intercede*, which means “to come between” or “to interpose on behalf of another.”

It’s such a tiny word with so many complicated nuances, meanings, and points of significance. The word *intercession* can conjure up many images in the human mind. Someone stepping in front of a bullet, to save another. A sledge hammer striking upon a surface with force until it eventually breaks through. One parent attempting to punish a child when another steps in and pleads for leniency. The word has many components and can take many different shapes, but when I think of intercession I think of a butterfly.

Isaac Newton quantified three laws of motion that eventually laid the foundation for the science of classical mechanics. These laws describe the relationship between any object and any force that acts upon it, stating when a force is applying itself to something, a motion will be in response to those forces. These laws have been worded and reworded over time, but can be summed up in the following ways:

- **First law:** An inertial reference frame, an object either remains at rest or continues to move at a constant velocity, unless acted upon by a net force.
- **Second law:** In an inertial reference frame, the vector sum of the forces on an object is equal to the mass of that object multiplied by the acceleration of the object.
- **Third law:** When one body exerts a force on a second body, the second body simultaneously exerts a force equal in magnitude and opposite in direction on the first body. (Or, in simpler terms, for every action there exists an equal and opposite reaction.)

All three laws can best be summed up in the simplest terminology possible by saying: things change other things. The things that we do, even the most minute of our daily actions, affect the world around us. At times, people refer to this fact as “the butterfly effect.”

The basic premise of the butterfly effect is that small causes can have large effects. It began as a theory in relation to the process of weather, and how something so insignificant as the flapping of a butterfly’s wings can create a chain

reaction that will eventually cause a storm. It has evolved into a metaphor for the reaction that every action of a person can cause. Just as Newton's laws of motions state, or like the flapping of a tiny butterfly's wings can affect the weather or throwing a tiny stone into a pool of water can cause a substantial ripple effect, every action that we take affects someone else. We cannot so much as inhale or exhale without changing the atmosphere around us as our lungs breathe in oxygen and expel carbon dioxide. Everything we do affects someone else, even in the natural world.

This is, without question, the case in the spiritual world as well. Our prayers, our words, our intercession—these things make an untold difference in the lives of the people we are praying for. Intercession is not only vital but a viable means of changing the circumstances of others and ourselves. Go ahead and encounter, meet, reach, entreat, strike, interpose, make attack. What feels like the insignificant flapping of butterfly wings to us can create untold change in the lives of others.

Formula

My basic working definition of intercession is this: Man asks. God acts. It's not a mathematical formula per se, but it is so accurate that Isaac Newton would surely approve. $A+B=C$. If A = Man's asking and B = God's acting, then what does C always equal? Is there one set reaction we can always count on from God? One specific thing that always results from the combination of A plus B ? For the answer to this, we turn to the Bible. Some of the first, and certainly most poignant, examples of intercession (and its results) can be found in the biblical account of the life of Abraham.

Abraham

“And Abraham said to God, ‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!’ Then God said, ‘Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation’” (Genesis 17:18-20, NIV).

A = Man asks. Abraham wanted Ishmael to live under the blessing of God.

B = God acts. God responded by saying He had heard Abraham and He would bless his son.

C= Ishmael was blessed, made fruitful, and increased in number. He was the father of twelve rulers and made into a great nation.

Abraham asked according to his own limited knowledge. He knew the Lord had promised to make him a great nation and his desire was to see that promise fulfilled through what he already had at his disposal. He wanted the fulfillment to come through the son that he could see. God saw things that Abraham could not, and while he blessed his son differently than Abraham might have requested or wished, He still listened to his desires and acted accordingly. According to Abraham's request, and according to His sovereign will.

"Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?' The LORD said, 'If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.' Then Abraham spoke up again: 'Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?' 'If I find forty-five there,' he said, 'I will not destroy it.' Once again he spoke to him, 'What if only forty are found there?' He said, 'For the sake of forty, I will not do it.' Then he said, 'May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?' He answered, 'I will not do it if I find thirty there.' Abraham said, 'Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?' He said, 'For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.' Then he said, 'May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?' He answered, 'For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.' When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home" (Genesis 18:23–33, NIV).

A= Man asks. Abraham had a close enough relationship with the Lord that He let Him in on His plans to destroy Sodom. (A lesson is to be learned in that itself. It is easier to pray toward situations when the Lord is close enough to us that He communicates with us about them.) Abraham had a distinct interest in this particular city because his nephew lived there. But even more than that, undoubtedly, he was horrified by the thought of so many people being destroyed. The Lord communicated what He intended to do, and Abraham asked Him to reconsider. The man stepped out in boldness and in faith, and he bargained with God, pressing Him again and again, edging Him toward agreeing to spare the city in its entirety.

B= God acts. God agreed to Abraham's request each time he made one, showing extreme patience and incredible mercy.

C= Even when ten righteous people could not be found within the city, the Lord held Abraham's interests and needs at heart, sending angel to rescue Lot and his family. The Lord did not solve the problem in Abraham's way – by sparing the entire city, but He did keep his needs and desires at heart as He took care of Abraham's family in His way, providing mercy and lenience that Lot did not deserve, just because of his connection to Abraham.

“Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again” (Genesis 20:17).

A= Man asks. Here's a little bit of background. Abraham, as was his custom, had asked Sarah to pretend to be his sister when they entered Abimelek's territory. This action, to begin with, showed a lack of faith in God and His ability to protect. Abraham was acting out of fear that the king would desire Sarah so greatly he would kill him and take her for his own. Instead, Sarah and Abraham acted as brother and sister, and Sarah was taken into the king's harem as Abraham came to no harm. God acted on Sarah's behalf, however, and smote the king's household with barrenness because of Sarah's presence in the harem. When the king realized that Sarah was, in fact, Abraham's wife, he called Abraham into his presence to confront him, and to return Sarah safely to his side. It was at this point that Abraham, who had definitely not exemplified steadfast trust or faith in God, prayed this simple prayer, asking God to heal everyone in Abimelek's household and make them fruitful.

B= God acts. God healed Abilmelek and his household so that they might have children again.

C= God did exactly as Abraham asked, in the way that he asked Him to.

Conclusion

Paul wrote to Timothy, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (I Timothy 2:1).

We are urged to pray. When we have an idea of what the answer should be, we are to pray. When we cannot see any way out of our situations, we are to pray. When we have been faithful and steadfast and feel we have been following after God’s heart, we are to pray. When we have strayed and wandered and moved away from Him, displaying a lack of faithfulness, we are to pray. When we feel like we deserve divine intervention, or we know for sure that we don’t, we are to pray.

For ourselves, for our families, for our friends, for those in foreign lands, for familiar faces and strangers alike, we are to pray. This is our job as Christians. The “A” and the “B” of the formula are stagnant, but the outcome seems to be different every time. Sometimes we are looking at all of the components in our situations, and sometimes we cannot see. Sometimes we are praying for the very things that God wants to give us, and sometimes He is bound to say no.

Here’s what we can count on: God has our best interest at heart. He sees us. He hears us. He has every situation we face in His hands as He holds us in His heart. **A+B will always equal C, if C=Trust. Man asks + God acts = Trust.**

When we bring something to the Lord, we never know how He will work it out, but we trust that He will do so. Our job, when it comes to intercession, is not to act, but to ask. The action is up to Him. The God who feels our needs, sees thousands of components that we cannot, is called to action when He hears our hearts. When we come to Him with our “ask,” we can rest assured that He will “act.”

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. What does the Latin word *intercede* mean?

2. How can the laws of motion be summed up in simple terminology?

3. What is the butterfly effect?

4. Write the basic working definition of *intercession*.

5. Where do we find a biblical example of intercession and its results?

6. How did God answer Abraham's intercession for Ishmael?

7. How did God answer Abraham's intercession for Sodom?

8. How did God answer Abraham's intercession for Abimelek?

9. When are we to pray?

10. If A (Man asks) + B (God acts) = C then what is "C?"

Lesson 11

Ask, Seek, Knock, Receive

KEY VERSE

“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Luke 11:9).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Show the need for persistence, boldness, and desperation in prayer
- Know how to persist in prayer.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

When I was a child, Dad would accuse me of “turning on the tears.” He meant he felt I was in the habit of crying to get him to bend to my will. I would always be so hurt by this, because he just didn’t understand. It wasn’t that I was crying to get what I wanted, but that I wanted it so much it made me cry. The smallest thing was of the utmost importance to me.

When I encountered something in life that I wanted, I ran straight to my father and I asked him for it. When he said no, I asked him again. If he kept saying no, I kept asking. Sometimes my father stood firm if what I wanted was out of our

means or if it really wasn't good for me. Most of the time, however, as long as I came to him with persistence, even after he turned to me and used the famous phrase "I SAID no!" he ended up granting my request.

What he doesn't know is that I never had any need of "turning on the tears." I didn't need them to manipulate him into giving me what I wanted. He was my father. He loved me. He loved to make me happy by granting any wish of mine that he could.

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11).

How many blessings are we denied because we do not run to our heavenly Father and simply ask? Just like my earthly father, He loves us. He loves to bless us. How many times have we missed out on a blessing because we did not come before Him with persistence, boldness, and desperation and just tell Him what we want?

Ask Again

In a previous lesson, we studied Abraham interceding for the city of Sodom in Genesis 18. Abraham asked the Lord to spare the city if He found fifty righteous people housed within it. The Lord agreed. Abraham asked the Lord to spare the city if He found forty righteous. The Lord agreed. Abraham asked the Lord to spare the city if He found thirty righteous. The Lord agreed. Abraham asks the Lord to spare the city if He finds twenty righteous. The Lord agrees. Abraham asked one final time if the Lord might spare the city if He found ten righteous within it. The Lord agreed again. I often wonder what would have happened in Abraham had asked one more time. If only he had kept opening his mouth and interceding, the Lord might have spared the entire city.

In his book *The Circle Maker*, Mark Batterson says: "Circle makers know that it's always too soon to quit praying because you never know when the wall is about to fall. You are always one prayer away from a miracle."

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine

adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, or regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8).

The Lord told this parable "unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not faint" – so that we would know the importance of asking, and asking again. This judge had no care or concern for God *or* people. The woman could not appeal to his practice of religion, because he had no faith in God. She could not appeal to his humanity, because he did not care about people. The parable is titled "the unjust judge." He didn't even have credible integrity as an official! Yet, out of absolutely no obligation to human decency or compassion, this man granted the widow what she wanted *because she kept asking*. "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Or will He find us lacking because we never so much as gathered the courage to ask or gave up too easily?

Be Bold

"Then Elijah said to the people, 'I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.'

"So all the people answered and said, 'It is well spoken.'

"Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, 'Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it.'

"So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, 'O Baal, hear us!' But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made.

"And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, 'Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or

he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.' So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.

"Then Elijah said to all the people, 'Come near to me.' So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, 'Israel shall be your name.' Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed. And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, 'Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.' Then he said, 'Do it a second time,' and they did it a second time; and he said, 'Do it a third time,' and they did it a third time. So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.

"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" (I Kings 18:22-38, NKJV).

Talk about boldness. In the presence of the people, and in the face of certain death, Elijah stood up and prayed with confidence and boldness. He put everything on the line in faith that his God would come through. And his God did.

Mark Batterson says, "God honors bold prayers because bold prayers honor God." God loves to hear us ask Him for things that only He can do, unashamedly and without fear or reservation. When we don't care who hears, or who sees, and we are willing to put everything on the line in faith that God will come through? He works wonders on our behalf.

Say It Like You Mean It

This phrase “Say it like you mean it” is often used to encourage people to recite a phrase with deep emotion. If you say something “like you mean it” often enough, you will be surprised to discover that you soon do. The Lord delights in authenticity. He also responds to genuine need, as is the case with Hannah:

“So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him” (I Samuel 1:9-17).

Hannah prayed out of the desperation of her soul. She took the longing of her heart straight to the only One who could do anything about it.

Lysa Terkeurst says in her *Uninvited Bible Study* that this was significant not only because Hannah was the first recorded example of personal prayer in the place of worship, but because of the deep intensity and desperation of her prayer. According to Terkeurst, even today when Jews meet at the Western Wall to pray and focus intently while moving their lips without sound, they are emulating the prayer of Hannah.

When you come before the Lord with your request in your desperation, not only does He see you, hear your cries, and act upon your request, but He makes

your life an example to other believers. Your faith in these times is made an encouragement to those who might have none.

Conclusion

Luke 11:9 states, “And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” In the New Living Translation of the Bible, this verse says, “And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened for you.”

Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking. If you come with persistence, boldness, and desperation you will be heard – and answered.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. What three things should you come before the Lord with?
A. _____
B. _____
C. _____

2. Why did the unjust judge give the widow what she asked for?

3. How many prayers away from a miracle are you?

4. Why does God honor bold prayers?

5. Give a biblical example of persistent prayer.

6. Give a biblical example of bold prayer.

7. Give a biblical example of desperate prayer.

8. When Jews pray at the Western Wall, who are they emulating?

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 12

Spiritual Warriors

KEY VERSE

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Define spiritual warfare
- Engage in spiritual warfare

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

A famous saying states: “You can’t judge a book by its cover.” It means that there are more to things than meet the eye. It’s easy to make a snap judgement about a person, a situation, or a place, without having all the facts. Based on appearances, we can come to all manner of false conclusions.

This saying applies to our lives in deeper ways than we will ever possibly perceive on this earth. You see, a physical world exists that we can touch, see, and feel. Yet, just as assuredly as that world is bustling with activity, an unseen world

is humming with busyness as well. In an unseen realm of spiritual activity, forces never rest or sleep; the entirety of creation constantly caught up in an unseen war. Just because we cannot see it, does not mean that it is not happening. It is real, it is active, and we are all a part of it, whether we actively engage in battle or not.

Michael Henson wrote an allegorical picture of this war. Written from the view point of an angel reporting on a case file, it is not an exact or factual representation of what is happening in the spirit world, but rather an imagining of what it might be like. The facts, shapes, and circumstances might not be the same, but rest assured that the spiritual activity in your own life is just as real as it appears in the exert you are about to read. Henson's allegory is used with his permission.

Unseen Activity

"Retrieving her Bible from her nightstand, Aiden pours herself a cup and sets another cup out for Hannah before settling in at the tiny kitchen table. She opens her Bible and the living glow refreshes the brightness in the room. Screams of frustration and annoyance from leathery blackness echo around the small room. Here and there the darkness tests the light that surrounds her and fills the room. Tentatively, strands of oozing black extend themselves from the rolling cloud and touch the protective dome of light, only to be thrown away shrieking and cursing. Safe within the umbrella of the Spirit covering her, unaware of the spiritual battle beginning around her, Aiden peacefully sips her coffee and reads the Word.

Thirty-seven miles away in a neighboring community, a young man abruptly puts down the controller for the video game he's been playing since he got home from school. Light pulses around him, energizing him, speaking to him. Head cocked slightly, eyes tightly closed, he listens intently. After a few moments, his eyes snap open and without hesitation he slips off his bed, aligns his knees with the two well-worn spots in the carpet and buries his face in the covers.

Before the opening words of his prayer can even be heard blinding, breathtaking towers of dazzling light shoot out of him into the sky. The warrior has answered the call to duty and has entered the battlefield with a vengeance. Demonic forces and the oily, glistening blackness in the vicinity surrounding his home stare in surprise and fear at the brightness and look for

somewhere darker to hide. They know better than to mess with this one. Only the strongest and bravest of demonic forces attack this warrior head-on.

His prayers take flight. Like a javelin thrown by the Olympic champion, they streak through the sky and impale the quivering blackness surrounding Aiden at her table. Blow after powerful blow rains down on Aiden's attackers as they creep toward her. Confused and caught off guard, demons turn tail and run away. Blackness seeps into the floor and through the walls like oil down a drain . . . looking for respite from the relentless, holy attack. The bombardment continues, the covering fire keeping the enemy's head down while the light of the Spirit guides reinforcements. . . .

Aiden's reading is interrupted by Hannah knocking on the door. Aiden hops up and rushes to let her in. Throughout the evening, they huddle over steaming cups of coffee as they pray, study, and discuss the Word together. Eventually, they move from the kitchen into Aiden's room and talk quieter to keep from waking Alex. It's in that tiny room, separated from the blackness of the world around her that Aiden makes the ultimate in life-changing decisions . . . she crosses over.

Convinced of her sinfulness, the love of Christ for her, and her need for a Savior, she bows her head, closes her eyes, and lifts her hands. Hannah wraps an arm around her shoulders as Aiden reaches out. Tentatively, she stretches her spiritual wings, seeking the Savior she so desperately needs. Light bubbles up from within as the power of the Creator fades from the backdrop into sharp focus by her side. Instantly, He is visible . . . His arms wrap around her, His light sears away the stains of blackness marking her. Her heart, her mind, her soul . . . no portion of her being goes untouched as the Creator recreates what was broken and decaying in her spirit.

Like a laborer cleaning the muck out of a horse's stall, He scoops layer upon layer of filth out of her. As He cleanses her the sin that lived within is burned away with brilliant, white light. No longer able to hold herself upright, she buries her face in the carpet and tears stream down her face as she releases years of hurt, pain, and abuse. Screaming and shrieking, her oppressors scamper into shadows outside. They quake and tremble, frightened that the Creator will turn His attention to them. . . .

He doesn't. His focus is on Aiden. Gently, He lifts her up. She lifts her hands in pure, unadulterated worship. Jumbled streams of thanksgiving spill from her lips as she struggles to express the gratitude that she feels . . . Lovingly, the Uncreated one cups her face

in His hands, smiles gently, and breathes new life into her soul. The mumbled stream of consciousness instantly transforms itself into a beautiful heavenly dialect. The other angelic warriors that have gathered listen in silence as she lifts her voice in a language only we and the Creator understand. Flawlessly, her praises and thankfulness continue in a beautiful outpouring of light and poetic, heavenly language. Rivers of life and light flow out of her and around the room.

The Spirit covers everything, beating back darkness effortlessly. The house steeped in darkness just moments before is now a beacon of holy light flooding the surrounding streets with power. The darkness shrieks and curses in raving madness. Angry at the loss of a “sure thing,” it boils away from the house wreaking havoc everywhere it touches. Across town, sparks fly, and a husband beats his wife while their toddler watches from a cracked bedroom door. At a bar down the street, a fight breaks out; three drunks end up in the hospital.

The darkness lost a trophy tonight. Aiden was born into darkness, surrounded and abused by it her entire life . . . but now she’s free. Since the darkness has no power over the light, its only recourse is to lash out at those that have opened themselves to it.

Aiden and Hannah spend the rest of the evening alternating between praying and talking about God. Hannah explains the need to be baptized in Jesus’ name for the remission of sins and then calls Pastor Batchelor to schedule Aiden baptism. Meanwhile, I and the rest of the angels worshiped the Creator in awe and celebration over another child coming home. In fact, while she was sleeping that night and going about her normal activities the next few days, we continued to worship Him. It was an amazing time. . . .”

Suit Up

The war is raging. The battle began long ago. Whether you like it or not, you are called to be an active participant in spiritual warfare. The time will come when your friends, your family, and/or the lost of this world will need you to fight for them. You will be called upon to stand on behalf of the people you love; your prayers will be needed to create a safe-haven from them. At times your prayers will be the only thing standing between the destruction of those you love or your very own life.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:10-12).

We are not called to lives of apathy, passively doing just what we need to do to get by. We are called to fight aggressively for ourselves and the world we have been given to love. This is a charge to take seriously. The Lord does not command us to do something, without first equipping us to be able to do it. We are meant to fight, yes. We are meant to stand in resistance to the devil, yes. Having first called us, He then provides us with a means to complete our calling. We must stand, yes. We must fight, yes. Yet, we have been provided with armor to help us do so.

Truth

In ancient times, men wore tunics as well as women. These garments were comfortable, but it was hard to work or maneuver in battle while wearing them. Men would “hoist the tunic up so that it was between their knees, giving them mobility. Then they would gather all of the extra material in front of them so the back of the tunic would be snug against their backside. Once the excess fabric was gathered in front they would pull it underneath and between their legs to their rear. They would gather half of the material with each hand, bringing it back around to the front, finishing by tying the two handfuls of material together.” (theartofmanliness.com) This action of preparing for battle while wearing a tunic was known as “girding your loins.”

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth”
(Ephesians 6:14).

The first step in putting on the armor of God is wrap yourself in truth. Truth is the foundation of greatness, and it is used to protect your most vulnerable parts. We are to wrap ourselves in truth to show our readiness for battle.

Righteousness

“And having the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14).

Once your heart is pierced, you are done for in battle. You cannot survive without your heart. This indispensable organ cannot be protected by our own strength and goodness. Our own righteousness falters and fails. We need the Lord to guard our hearts.

Peace

“And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15).

The world is in turmoil. Feet shod with the peace will claim territory for God wherever they step. Feet shod in peace will calm chaos when they walk down the street. Feet shot in peace will silence the screams of the enemy long enough for the sound of salvation to get through.

Faith

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of wicked” (Ephesians 6:16).

Faith is the most important component. When life distracts us, when fears assail us, when the circumstances we have stepped into threaten to steal our joy and quench our zeal for living – faith is the shield that will ward off the attack of the enemy.

Salvation

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

A body is rendered useless without its head. You might cut off the head of a snake, for example, and while it might live for a few more moments, writhing around and thrashing about, it is already done for. Protecting your head is a

gravely important task, and the Lord takes care of it for us. He saves us beyond our own ability to produce salvation for ourselves, and fills us with His Spirit. How does the Spirit operate? How does the Spirit change, heal, and restore? Through the sword of the Word of God.

Conclusion

We are not meant to live our lives taking the world at surface value, concerned about our own needs. There is a world waiting just beyond our vision, a battle raging just out of the grasp of our natural mind. Like the young man in the work of fiction followed the prompting of the Spirit and knelt in prayer, effecting a situation happening in a neighboring town, we are called to listen with Spirit ears, see with Spirit eyes, and wait in sensitivity for what the Lord would have us do. We ought to be willing to act at any time, waiting for a chance to wage war against the darkness surrounding the world He came to save.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

The Lord meant for us to do battle. Had He not, He would not have given us armor.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. Summarize the fictional story found in the lesson.

2. Why should we put on the armor of God?

3. What does it mean to “gird up your loins?”

4. Why are we to wrap ourselves in truth?

5. What does righteousness guard?

6. What will feet shod with peace do?

7. What is the most important component of the armor of God?

8. What protects our heads?

9. What is the sword of the Spirit?

10. What is one way we know that the Lord meant for us to do battle?

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 12

Kingdom Praying

KEY VERSE

“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”
(Matthew 6:10).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- To instruct others how to have a kingdom mindset in prayer
- To make others aware of the power of prayer evangelism

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, He responded with the famous words known as the Lord’s Prayer. I have often overlooked a phrase housed within this prayer: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” It is easy for me to remember to pray that He forgives my trespasses, and helps me forgive others theirs. I *never* forget to pray for my daily bread or the provision that I need. I often even manage to remind Him that His is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. That’s just it though. It’s His kingdom. While I remain concerned about my daily life, the things I will eat, the things I will drink, what I will wear, where I will go, I leave the management of God’s kingdom

entirely up to Him. After all, I have said “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” It’s covered. “Whatever you want to do in Your kingdom, Lord, You just go ahead and do that. Now about my finances” Sometimes, I am forced to admit, my way of praying is almost in contradiction with God’s Word:

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (Matthew 6:25).

Nothing is wrong with talking to the Lord about the things that concern us. He cares about those things (I Peter 5:7) and He is working to perfect them. (See Psalm 138:8.) The problem begins when we forget that life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment. A world full of people is waiting for our influence. Undoubtedly, the things we do and say and accomplish in our life will have an impact on the world surrounding us, but at the same time we must be constantly aware of the kingdom of God. The unseen forces at play and the power we have can affect those forces from our knees, without our so much as ever opening the door to exit our prayer closets.

We were created to care for others, just as Jesus did.

“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:4-11).

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” What was Jesus concerned about? The furthering of His kingdom. From the beginning of time that has been His purpose.

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath deal to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in on body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:3-8).

All members of the body of Christ are vital to the function of the Kingdom. Furthermore, the Lord desires to add lost souls to His house daily. That’s why I think this verse can be read two ways:

- 1.) Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought as in, do not give way to pride because everyone is important.
- 2.) Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought as in, do not prioritize yourself before others.

When I look at this verse, I realize that I should not be putting myself above others in my mind, in my own esteem, or on my prayer list. Before I bring my needs to the Lord, I must consider the needs of His kingdom.

“For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost”
(Luke 19:10).

The whole purpose of Christ’s mission here on earth was to seek and save the lost. His will is that lost souls should be saved. In service to Him, my will should match His will. If my will matches His will, I will pray Kingdom prayers.

Kingdom Praying

Sermons are impactful, tracts are effective, songs are influential, and books turn the tide of time and culture. However, prayer is the most vital evangelistic tool mankind possesses. Just as fires must have fuel, evangelistic effort must be

fed and fortified by the power of prayer. Jesus said, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:38).

Kingdom praying is evangelistic praying because kingdom prayer is focused on the harvest. It seems obvious and simple to state, but Kingdom prayer is centered on the Kingdom. Kingdom prayer looks outside of ourselves, our daily routines, our needs, and our families to focus on the kingdom of God and asking for His will to be done here on earth just as it is done in Heaven. Such prayer focuses solely on the propagation of God's kingdom.

There are three components to Kingdom prayer:

- 1.) God
- 2.) Others
- 3.) You

God

"And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory" (Exodus 33:12-18).

Moses beseeched the Lord to take an active part in the leading of His people. He requested that God show him His glory and that He lead Moses and guide him in the manner that would be most pleasing to Him. He asked the Lord to help him know Him better, acknowledging that when we know the Lord better, a greater understanding of His will and His way will follow. First and foremost,

we must seek the face of the Lord when we embark on kingdom prayer. We can accomplish nothing without Him.

Others

“And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O LORD, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king’s cupbearer” (Nehemiah 1:4-11).

Nehemiah’s prayer is a perfect picture of the second component of Kingdom praying. After you invite the presence of God into the room and ask Him to show you what He would like for you to pray according to His will, your focus should shift to others. It isn’t so much a denial of yourself and your own desires as it is a changing of your desires to match more closely with His. When that happens the change in your thought and prayer pattern will be obvious.

You

“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:24-33).

Peter and John exemplify the final trait of Kingdom prayer in these verses, which is asking the Lord to help them further His name and Kingdom. When He does, performing miracles only He can perform and solving problems only He can solve, He gets all the glory as His kingdom is advanced.

Conclusion

Prayer has the power to stretch beyond the parameters of your physical location and change the hearts and lives of people you will never see. Kingdom praying is one of the most effective evangelical tools you will ever have occasion to encounter. It is a simple three step process:

- 1.) Come before the Lord and asking Him to show you His face, His will, and the right hand of His mighty power.

- 2.) Beseech Him to intervene in the lives of His servants and the lost to further His kingdom.
- 3.) Ask Him to bless you and enable you to do what must be done for His will to be accomplished.

Kingdom prayers save souls, change lives, soften hearts, and tear down strongholds. Let us pray like never before that His kingdom come, His will be done, and watch Him perform wonders we could not have imagined.

What Have You Learned?

Answer the following questions.

1. How did Jesus respond to His disciple's query of how to pray?

2. What was Jesus concerned about?

3. What two ways can you read Romans 12:3?

A.

B.

4. What will happen if my will matches God's will?

5. What is the most vital evangelistic tool humanity possesses?

6. What is Kingdom prayer centered on?

7. What are the three components to Kingdom prayer?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

8. What is the simple, three step process of Kingdom prayer?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Lesson 14

Fasting, Part I

KEY VERSE

“Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting”
(Matthew 17:21).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- To clearly define fasting, its origin, and its purpose
- To give biblical reasons for fasting.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

I don't know if you have recently been privy to the experience of a child throwing a temper tantrum. On the off chance that you have not, allow me to review the stages of a tantrum with you:

- 1.) Child wants to do, be, or attain something
- 2.) Child is denied
- 3.) Child pitches a fit until child gets his or her way

“Pitching a fit” can be accomplished in many ways including, but not limited to, yelling, screaming, kicking, punching, refusing to eat, sit down, or shut up, flailing about, throwing things, or (and this is often the most effective tactic) holding their breath until they get their way.

Fasting is often viewed in this light: that of a child of God throwing a spiritual tantrum until he or she gets his or her way. Holding our breath, as it were, to get the attention of God, turning red with rage and blue with lack of oxygen until, at the very last minute before we pass out, the Lord caves like a tired parent and answers your prayer. This is a colorful analogy, but falls short of being an accurate one.

This is the exact opposite of what fasting is supposed to be. Now that we know what fasting is not, let’s look at what it is. Through this study we will learn that fasting is less a way of manipulating God into giving you what you wish for, and more a way of denying yourself to enable you to better focus upon Him.

Fasting: A Definition

Fasting is defined as “abstinence from food or drink as an element of private or public religious devotion” (biblestudytools.com). The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines fasting as follows: “to abstain from food; to eat sparingly or abstain from some foods.”

Fasting is shown throughout Scripture as a helpful means of regaining focus on God or drawing closer to Him in prayer. However, is not a specific command or mandate to God’s people. It was not a requirement except for during the Day of Atonement. This day, celebrated once a year, is described in the Leviticus:

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It

shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:26-32, NKJV).

In Jeremiah, we see that fasting was a definite part of this day.

“You go, therefore, and read from the scroll which you have written at my instruction, the words of the LORD, in the hearing of the people in the LORD’s house on the day of fasting. And you shall also read them in the hearing of all Judah who come from their cities” (Jeremiah 36:6, NKJV).

If fasting was only required on one day a year, and in the Old Testament at that, surely we can escape it! After all, we are under a new dispensation of grace! New dispensation of grace or not, Jesus Himself showed us an example of fasting: “After fasting forty days and forty nights He was hungry” (Matthew 4:2).

Perhaps that was somehow still under the old dispensation! Jesus had not yet died for the sins of the world, surely after that happened fasting was no longer necessary!

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2-3, NKJV).

It would appear that fasting is a theme throughout the entire narrative of Scripture. When humanity becomes serious about denying themselves to hear from God, they turn to the practical and effective tool of fasting.

Bible.org points out that biblical fasting falls into five basic categories:

- 1.) As a sign of grief or mourning
- 2.) As a sign of repentance and seeking forgiveness from sin
- 3.) As an aid in prayer
- 4.) As an experience of the presence of God that results in the endorsement of His messenger
- 5.) As an act of ceremonial public worship

Fasting as a sign of mourning

We don't have to live very long to know that life can knock the breath straight out of our lungs on occasion. During these times, it is natural to become desperate to know that we have the attention of Heaven. During times of grief and mourning, fasting becomes an intentional way to focus all our efforts upon gaining the ear of the only person able to do anything about our sorrow. Every movement is so painful and so poignant in these times that we take great pains to ensure that God is with us, and our next step is the right one.

"And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned (certain) days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven" (Nehemiah 1:4).

"But I, when they were sick – I wore sackcloth, I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayer with head bowed on my chest. I went about as though I grieved for my friend or my brother; as one who laments his mother, I bowed down in mourning" (Psalm 35:13–14, ESV).

"They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword" (II Samuel 1:12, ESV).

Fasting as a sign of repentance and seeking forgiveness from sin

"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws" (Daniel 9:3–5).

"There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel. When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly" (I Kings 21:25–27, NIV).

“‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing – grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God” (Joel 2:12-14, NIV).

“So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them” (Jonah 3:5).

“I’m sorry” is easy to say. Aside from the slightest cost to your pride (zero cost if you are insincere), they are not difficult words to say. This is why, in certain times, I feel that God needed an extra assurance of sincerity. If I have been greatly wronged by a member of my family, for example, I need more than the mere words as assurance they regret their actions. I need them to reverse the negative effects of their actions by more actions. Better actions. Actions that show they truly mean what they say enough to do more than speak the words, and enter into living the life of atonement. God is no different. Lip service is far from all He requires. He wants the inner workings of a penitent heart to be made manifest in outward actions.

Fasting as an aid in prayer

“And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, ‘Why could not we cast him out?’ and Jesus said unto them, ‘Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:14-21).

Fasting adds fuel to the fire of our prayers, ensuring they pack a stronger punch in our attack on the enemy.

Fasting as an experience in God that results in the endorsing of His messenger

“In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: his body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. And behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then he said unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days. And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb. And, behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are tuned upon me, and I have

retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? For as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me. And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou has strengthened me" (Daniel 10:2-19).

This is an incredible passage of Scripture. Daniel, the messenger of the Lord, was waiting for relief and confirmation. At the end of a very long fast, an angel showed up and supplied this. He informed Daniel he would have been there sooner had he not been wrestling with a demonic prince. Finally, aided by the fasting and prayer of Daniel, he overcame to refresh and strengthen Daniel, reconfirming the Lord's purpose in Him.

Fasting as an act of ceremonial public worship

Ofttimes, especially in the Old Testament, fasting was done to publicly acknowledge and worship God.

"Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God" (Nehemiah 9:1-3).

"To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry" (Esther 9:31).

Conclusion

It would be easier to walk away from the notion of fasting altogether and continue to indulge our flesh. This, then, is the point. Rather than indulging our

flesh, we set aside times of fasting when our hearts are sorrowful or to aid in prayer to show our sincerity in repentance, receive God's direction or endorsement, or worship Him as a corporate body.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED

Answer the following questions.

1. How is fasting different than a toddler throwing a tantrum?

2. What is the general definition of *fasting*?

3. What is the Biblical definition of *fasting*?

4. What are the five biblical types of fasting?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

5. Give a biblical example of fasting as a way of mourning.

6. Give a biblical example of fasting as a sign of repentance and forgiveness of sin.

7. Give a biblical example of fasting as an aid in prayer.

8. Give a biblical example of fasting as an experience with God, gaining His endorsement as a messenger.

9. Give a biblical example of fasting as an act of cooperate worship.

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 15

Fasting, Part II

KEY VERSES

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:16-18).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Discuss the benefits and results of fasting – both physical and spiritual
- Value suffering as a tool helping us conform to the image of Jesus.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

It is not in the nature of man to deny himself. Ever since over indulgent Eve took the first bite of that apple, self and sanctity have struggled with each other. The idea of suffering is foreign to our thinking. Love wants what’s best for us, so naturally love should see to our comfort and our ease. Unfortunately, that is not what real love does.

Our vision is so limited we can hardly imagine a love that does not show itself in protection from suffering. The love of God is of a different nature altogether. It does not hate tragedy. It never denies reality. It stands in the very teeth of suffering. The love of God did not protect His own Son. That was the proof of His love—that He gave that son, that He let Him go to Calvary’s cross, though legions of angels” might have rescued Him. He will not necessarily protect us—not from anything it takes to make us like His Son. A lot of hammering and chiseling and purifying by fire will have to go into the process (Elisabeth Elliot in *Passion and Purity*).

Jesus was no stranger in suffering. In fact, God robed in flesh, took to the desert for forty days to subject that flesh to some pain and strain to get it under submission.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:1-4).

“Indulge yourself,” the devil whispered. Nothing is wrong with eating (in moderation). Jesus certainly had the power to provide food for Himself, so it would seem to be an easy solution. The devil sounded sensible, but Jesus knew better. He understood that He was training His flesh into submission to God. He was strengthening His flesh for a work unbelievable. The devil knew that if He could make Jesus self-indulgent, then he would ultimately win the battle. Jesus knew that if He remained strong, He would forever win the war.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep

watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (Matthew 26:36-46, NKJV).

When I read this passage, I realize that I am looking at Jesus as God alone. I am sympathetic of the disciples in the Garden because they are mere men whereas Jesus is deity, so He must have an unfair advantage. Such is not the case. Jesus was fully man. He had the same flesh, blood, desires, and stamina that they had. He was not given some celestial advantage that allowed Him to stay awake for long hours or some magic potion that did the work for Him. He was a man, who had formed habits of training His flesh into submission. They were capable of the same amount of prayer, focus, and dedication that He was. They had just neglected to train their flesh. This is what fasting does. Life is a spiritual battle and prayer and fasting are the basic skills a beginner might learn at boot camp.

Spiritual Benefits of Fasting

A simple Google search will show you multiple physical benefits of fasting, but the spiritual benefits are immeasurable. Here are just a few of them (aside from the ones discussed in the previous lesson):

Deliverance from addiction:

"Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it? Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day

acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:3-7, ESV).

To ask for the Lord's protection:

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty" (Ezra 8:21-23, ESV).

To clarify the calling of the Lord:

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2, NKJV).

To gain the favor of the Lord:

"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16, NIV).

Conclusion

Perhaps fasting is not a Heaven or Hell issue. However, when we take time to discipline ourselves, to set ourselves apart for God, to put action behind our words of supplication, then the attention of the Lord rests upon us. Disciplining the flesh always bring us closer to God. Saying no to our flesh is always saying yes to Him.

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:16–18, ESV).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. According to Elisabeth Elliot, why does God not shield us from suffering?

2. When the devil told Jesus to turn stones into bread, what was he really whispering?

3. Was Jesus more capable of praying than the disciples?

4. If life is a spiritual battle, what might we learn at boot camp?

5. List some spiritual benefits of fasting.

6. If there were no spiritual benefits to fasting, what should compel us to put it into action?

7. What is saying no to your flesh saying to God?

Lesson 16

Holiness in Prayer

KEY VERSE

“I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (I Timothy 2:8).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Define *holiness*
- Explain the importance of holiness in the habit of prayer.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

Separation is not the happiest topic in Pentecost. Human nature wants to fit in, to look the same as everyone else, to talk the same way everyone else does, and to be accepted. Separation is so often so inconvenient. The call of God is a call to separation, however. “Come out from among them and be separate” (II Corinthians 6:17). We, who love God and choose to follow Him, are to be set apart. We must separate from the world because one cannot separate the call of God from a call to be holy. Peter said, “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (I Peter 1:16).

God says, “Be holy, for I am holy.” And He is indeed holy.

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 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 4:14–16).

Jesus sacrificed Himself so that we might now boldly come to the throne of grace and obtain mercy. Before I ever begin to think about what I can or cannot get away with, what is or is not a Heaven or Hell issue, which rules I can break and which rules I must follow, I think about a God who sacrificed all for me. God loved me so much He laid His life down so that we might enjoy communion together. When He is willing to do all of that for me, God forbid that I ever deny Him a request of His. If He wants me to be separate—I will be separate. If He wants me to be holy—I will attempt to attain holiness.

Our High Priest has chosen us to walk with Him and proclaim His goodness. Peter proclaimed, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9).

Many people today get so caught up in the inconvenience of holiness when, in actuality, holiness is an honor. It’s a banner. It’s an anthem. Our outward holiness is a vital, visible tribute to the holy God we serve. I repeat, it is an honor act different, to make different choices, and if necessary to look different from the world.

Let’s say you are at a party and you are sitting in the crowd when someone who is running the event comes to you and says: “Please, we want to honor you. Would you mind leaving this seat and coming to sit at this table in front of everyone?” That is a situation where you would be looking at you, where you would no longer “fit in.” But you wouldn’t be complaining about it. You would be walking with pride, overcome with joy that you had been singled out. Everyone who looked at you would know that you were important and special. Separation wouldn’t be so “inconvenient” then. Separation at that time, would be anything but inconvenient. It would be considered an honor.

Separation from the world should be considered an honor as well. You are so important and loved that the Creator of the universe wants to be a part of your life. He wants to walk with you. He is calling you to be more like Him. He wants you to be holy as He is holy. That's something you should get excited about. That's something that you shouldn't mind proclaiming in the way that you walk and talk.

Our outward holiness is a tribute to His holiness. Holiness is a uniform by which the world will immediately know to whom we belong. That isn't inconvenient. That's an incredible honor. Separation is not just *from* the world, it is *unto* Christ. As a Christian, your very first desire and thought should be to please God and to walk in the way that He would have you walk. So our commitment to Him calls us to sexual purity before marriage and to dress modestly.

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Romans 8:5-9).

We shouldn't be living our lives according to the flesh but walking in the Spirit and setting our minds on God. Our first thought should not be “What will they think of me if I don't ever wear jewelry?” but “What does God think? How can I honor God with my actions?”

This lesson does not have enough room for a breakdown of each and every aspect of outward (or inward) holiness. There is not enough time to go point by point for a discussion about hair, jewelry, modesty, sexual purity, distinction of gender in dress, alcohol, drug use, so on and so forth. Holiness is an almost endless topic. Raymond Woodward, however, gives us seven solid points about holiness that could be a start to discussion or study on the topic matter:

- 1.) Holiness involves both the “negative” concept of separation and the “positive” concept of dedication (II Corinthians 6:17-7:1, 17).
- 2.) We are not saved by works, but we are saved unto works. (See Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:17-18).

- 3.) Holiness is not a means of earning salvation, but a result of experiencing it (Titus 3:5).
- 4.) God demands an external witness of our internal holiness (Matthew 5:1).
- 5.) God gives us three holiness teachers to show us how to live a life that pleases Him: The Bible, spiritual leadership, and the Holy Spirit through conviction.
- 6.) The Bible teaches us three kinds of holiness standards that God expects every mature Christian to adhere to:
 - a.) Bible Standards—Explicitly commanded in Scripture and demand immediate obedience.
 - b.) Church Standards—Established by spiritual leadership.
 - c.) Personal Standards—Prompted by the Holy Spirit in individual lives due to the unique background of each believer.
- 7.) Because holiness principles deal more with our creation than with our culture, God’s Word emphasizes them differently for women and for men.

These points can be used as food for thought and study or a way to begin discussion with your pastor. They are also an excellent foundation for beginning to map out how you will practice holiness in your own life and how you will teach it to others. Holiness is not just about our outward standard of dress or behavior—it begins in the heart. In fact, if it does not begin with the heart, it is not holiness. It is more than a rule book or a list of dos or don’ts. Holiness begins with you as a Christian sitting down with the Lord and saying:

“Lord, I want to please You. Lord, I want You to use me. I desire to be as holy as possible because I know that You are holy and You are calling me to be more like You. I am going to be intentional about looking for ways to honor You. I intend to be persistent in my pursuit of holiness. Show me how to dress. Show me how to live. Show me how to walk and talk. My number one aim and goal in life is not to be acceptable to the world, but to be accepted by You. You gave up everything for me so there is nothing that I won’t give up for you.”

“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).

Our reasonable service is to offer ourselves to God. It's to make the commitment: "I won't worry about being accepted by the world. I desire to be a daily sacrifice that is acceptable to You."

Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice when He acted on our behalf through death on the cross. Now we are called to present ourselves a living sacrifice to Him. In the way that we live our lives, the things that we wear and don't wear, think and don't think, say and don't say, do and don't do. That isn't unfair. That isn't inconvenient.

In fact, it's an honor. Holiness is our reasonable service. Our lives are a sacrifice; it is an honor to offer.

The Bible not only communicates God's wish for prayer, but also the manner in which He would like us to pray: "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (I Timothy 2:8).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. The call of God is also a call unto what?

2. The practice of holiness is often considered to be an inconvenience when it should, in fact, be considered a what?

3. As a Christian, what should your very first desire be?

4. We shouldn't worry about being acceptable to the world but to who?

5. What is our "reasonable service"?

6. How are men and women everywhere to pray?

Lesson 17

Leadership Praying

KEY VERSE

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (Ephesians 6:18).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Show the importance of praying over those they are leading
- Provide instruction as to how to pray over those they are leading.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

No one portrayed the true task of a leader better than Jesus Christ.

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him; Jesus knowing

that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper. And laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou has not part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:1-17).

The opinion of many in the world is that when we become a leader, when we have finally reached the top and people are under us in rank and situation, we no longer have to do any of the work. They think that by nature of our position, people will handle the hard situations and unpleasant tasks for us and our job will be to merely show up and give orders. Such is not the case.

It is rarely and hardly the case even in the realm of business, but in the spiritual realm it is 100 percent not. To be great in the kingdom of God, we must first be a servant. To lead others to great heights, we must be willing to stoop low.

Jesus demonstrated this on the night that He washed His disciples's feet. Hours before He broke His body like bread to be handed out for blessing, He symbolically demonstrated what was to come at the dinner table with His disciples. The kingdom of God works like this: We are blessed to be a blessing.

“And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so I will save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong” (Zechariah 8:13).

These verses do not say, “I will bless you, Israel, so that everything will finally go your way in life” or “I will bless you, Israel, so that you might sit back and relax.” No. They say, “I will bless you and you will be a blessing.” The whole point of us being blessed is for us to turn around and bless in turn. We are given to, to give others.

When we give what we have away, however, the Lord does not leave us lacking. He requires that we give all we have to Him, only so that He can give us all He has for us.

One of the most important components of how we are to be a blessing to those who are under our leadership is that we are to sacrifice time and energy in praying for them. Jesus, our example of a servant leader, prays for us even now:

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:34).

Christ, the holiest of holy, who has Heaven and Earth at His perpetual disposal, and the problems and needs of an entire universe to contend with, takes the time to pray for us. He makes war in the heavenlies through intercession on our behalf. If He takes the time to pray for His people, we should take the time to pray for ours. We are blessed to be a blessing.

A Plan for Prayer

Paul wrote to the to the Philippians, the first church that he founded in Macedonia. The whole book is really a thank you note from a leader to his followers, but housed within the verses are a clear model for how he prayed for them as well.

“Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for

your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:2-11).

1.) Express Gratitude

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you"

The first thing Paul put into practice when he went to prayer for his people is gratitude and thankfulness to the Father for all they are accomplishing and how far they have come. Each person we are called upon to lead is a specific treasure designed and designated just for us. Whether they are easy to deal with or not they bring specific qualities into our life which only they can provide. They will each help our heart through joy or teach us by some test or trial. When we dive into prayer for them, make it a habit to spring off the launching pad of gratitude.

2.) Pray for their salvation.

"Making all requests with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now"

So many things can come between saints and their salvation. The children of God will encounter many footholds and pitfalls. Pray those who follow us might be strengthened in the fight for their own souls, that they might learn more of God and His word each day, and that they might preach and propagate this precious gospel while standing firmly in it.

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12, NIV).

3.) Pray that love abounds.

“That your love may abound yet more and more in all knowledge and judgment”

Love is the most important thing. It is the currency by which the kingdom of God is exchanged. Pray that those who follow us live a lifestyle fully infused with love and that we are able to model this behavior for them with our own lifestyle.

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (I Corinthians 13:13).

4.) Pray that excellence prevails.

“That ye may approve things that are excellent”

We are called to represent Christ in all that we do. We need to be in the practice of producing excellence in work, relationship, and deed. Saints of God should be known for doing good, sound work. Pray this over the people that you lead.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

5.) Pray against offence

“That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ”

Nothing causes problem, disunity, or strife in the kingdom of God like an offence. For the kingdom of God to march forward, we must act as one unified body. Pray against offence and hurt in the people that we are leading, that they will have one mind and be of one accord. When unity prevails, the church is functioning at its best.

“Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you” (Colossians 3:13).

6.) Pray your followers are fruitful

“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness”

Do not just pray that our followers are successful in life, but that they are fruitful in the spirit. Pray that this spiritual fruit will be made manifest in their lives.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith” (Galatians 5:22).

Conclusion

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (Ephesians 6:18).

We can be a good leader in so many ways. We can be organized, good at delegating, efficient, ready to run any meeting with skill and with ease at any time, but if we do not pray for our followers then we are failing as a leader. Our people need the strength of our presence of mind, when things confuse them. They need the sincerity of our heart, when things are hurting and hindering them. They need the skill of our problem-solving skills when life is perplexing and bewildering them. Yet, more than they need any of that, they need our prayers.

They need to know that we are waring and fighting on behalf as only we can. And it’s true, that only we can. Something is incredibly significant about the way someone who is shepherding a flock can pray for them. So lead. Delegate. Correct. Guide. Assign tasks. Do all of these things, always remembering to pray for those the Lord has given us to work with. After all, the Lord never forgets to pray for you.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. Who best portrayed the true task of a leader?

2. Who makes intercession for us?

3. Why are we blessed?

4. Where do we find a clear model for how to pray for those we are leading?

5. How should we begin prayer over those we are leading?

6. What five things should we pray over them?

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____
- E. _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 18

Children's Prayer

KEY VERSE

"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger" (Psalm 8:2).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, students should be able to

- Demonstrate the importance of children's prayer
- Provide instruction for leading children in prayer.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

Introduction

"There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet they go forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces" (Proverbs 30:24–28).

Let's look at these verses again in the Common English Bible:

“Four things are among the smallest on earth, but they are extremely wise: Ants as creatures aren't strong, but they store away their food in the summer. Badgers as creatures aren't powerful, but they make their homes in the rocks. Locusts don't have a king, but they mark together in ranks. You can catch lizards in your hand, but they are in kings' palaces” (Proverbs 30:24-28, CEB).

These verses are some of my favorite because they discuss small creatures that can accomplish big things. It is the natural tendency of man to disregard or discredit smaller, more vulnerable creatures. However, we serve a God who finds great value and usefulness in small things. For example, Jesus re-emphasized again and again the importance of children in His Kingdom:

“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto the, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:13-16).

“And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall no wise enter therein” (Luke 18:15-17)

“Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence” (Matthew 19:13-15).

Here we see three separate counts of the same incident. Right in the middle of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of Heaven and as He was being accosted to

give His viewpoint on such things as the validity of re-marriage after divorce, Jesus took time to acknowledge children.

During an age when children were of little value, Jesus gave them the greatest stamp of validity possible by stating that to enter His kingdom one must be like a little child. Children clearly have a straight and unfettered access to the ear of God, possessing great and unparalleled faith. With them possessing natural power like that, it stands to reason that we should be teaching them to pray. If I know automatically that someone will have power before a throne, I will ask them to petition it for me. So it is with children; children can accomplish so much in the kingdom of God, their earnest prayers and sincere faith moving mountains almost without effort. We must teach them to pray. We must cultivate a love of prayer in their hearts. After all, from such as these is built the kingdom.

Why Teach Children?

The Bible has some strong things to say about the care we should take in treating children:

“For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea” (Mark 9:41-43).

“At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:1-6).

About children Jesus said: They are the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven; you must become like them; if you love or serve a child, you are really loving

and serving me; if you hurt a child or hinder their spiritual growth, then your fate is sealed.

It's easy to see that Jesus puts a high market value on children and that one of the best ways to grow your church (and His kingdom) is to invest in the life of a child. Today's children are tomorrow's leaders, so today's children should not be tomorrow's priority. We should be concerned about them now, investing in their lives now, training them up in the way they should go now.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

When we train up a child, two things happen:

- 1.) The Kingdom is effected (Through children already putting into practice Kingdom principles of prayer and fasting.)
- 2.) The future is secured (By ensuring that we have strong, wise, prayerful leaders for the future when we train strong, wise, prayerful children.)

How Do You Teach Children?

Ministry-to-children.com provides ten amazing points on how to teach children:

1. **Follow the Minute Rule.** Here's how it works. Poll your class to find the median age of your students. If your students' age average is ten years old, you should teach in ten minute blocks. If your students average age is four years old, you should teach in four minute blocks. Kids will tune you out after that.
2. **Take the class to different places.** Go outside, sit under a tree. Put blankets on the floor of the classroom and have a picnic. Mix up the teaching venue. Jesus did, and it worked!
3. **Ask children to respond.** Just repeating key words or having them repeat a phrase back to the teacher will keep the kids's attention. It catches their interest and ropes their imaginations back in.
4. **Always use object lessons.** Kids need and want visuals. Drive concepts like faith and God's holiness home by using objects to explain how they work.
5. **Break up long lessons** with team play and games. Use fun as a reward and a tool for reviewing what they've just learned.

6. **Offer immediate feedback.** Use question/answer sessions throughout each lesson. Be prepared to answer questions about all subjects though.
7. **Invite guests to speak to your class.** This helps connect learning with life. Consider missions workers, Christian musicians, or just regular people who integrate faith into their vocation.
8. **Keep learning. Stay curious.** It's essential for us yourself to keep hungry for God's Word. A healthy Bible reading habit keeps teachers ready for spontaneous lessons and gives their students special teaching nuggets.
9. **Consider incentives.** This will depend on the teaching style and class personality. Verbal praise is always the most powerful but occasional prizes can help the kids focus. Consider the pros and cons before announcing extrinsic rewards.
10. **Do the unexpected.** While having a set schedule is comforting for some kids, it gets boring after a while. Always come back to the set schedule but don't be afraid to do things differently. Don't be too predictable. Shake it up by doing something unexpected.

Resources like ministry-to-children.com are available within seconds via the world-wide web. I would add to these practical tips my own points about teaching children to pray and children's ministry.

1. **Prioritize it.** Often times we say things are important, but we fail to communicate this with our actions. Make children's ministry a priority. Put money into it. Put planning into it. Make it an important part of your church discussion and calendar.
2. **Plan it.** Care enough about the children's events to plan them in advance. Take time to study when you are scheduled to speak to them. Make a schedule for the children's ministry and stick to it. Do research, don't just throw something together last minute.
3. **Pray over it.** Make children's ministry the topic of prayer. Fast for a breakthrough in the lives and hearts of the children. Put prayer toward the sessions, events, and interactions you will have with them.
4. **Promote it.** Make the children's ministry something everyone knows about. When you go out to evangelize people or invite them to your church, make sure to tell them about your children's ministry and emphasize the importance of their children.
5. **Play with it.** This is my favorite point. Have fun with your children's ministry. Children's ministry should be deep and moving, with moments of sincere prayer and times spend in the quiet of God's

presence. However, children are fun and there should also be times where you laugh and play, sing, and dance. Be creative with the imagination of your children and you will be surprised what happens. Here is an example of a fun but informative children's skit on the topic of prayer:

Skit

Characters:

- Professor Talks-too-much (Prim and proper, maybe speaks with a fancy accent. Basically, comes across as verbose and rambling, but hidden under all of that is a lot of wisdom).
- Friend #1 (Betty- think along the lines of Betty from the Archie comics)
- Friend #2 (Bob- really energetic, boastful, wanting to show that he is the BEST at being a friend . . . though he is far from it)

Act I:

Professor Talks-too-much: Good afternoon, my most esteemed class members, students, learners, pupils and scholars. Today, we have a most excellent sketch in the art of communications, talking, relationships, etc. Today, two friends from the twentieth-first century era will allow us a small peek into what it is like to communicate well...or not well with a friend. There is much that can be learned in the way that we communicate with other individuals . . . in fact, it can even help us when we communicate with the Lord, Jehovah, Jesus, the Most High, Alpha and Omega and so on. But, more on that later! For now, let's go to our visiting friends.

Friend#1: Hi, my name is Betty. I like to bake things. (Leans close in a whisper.) Don't tell anyone else but I like to bake things for my friend Bob in particular, chocolate chip cookies are his favorite.)

Friend#2: (Yell as loud as possible. All Bob's lines should be yelled, for the rest of the skit.) Hi! My name is Bob. I am friends with Betty. Oh look! There she is now! Betty! Betty! Betty! Betty! Betty! Betty! Betty! Betty! Betty!

Friend#1: (Nervously) Hey... Bob... Why are you saying my name so many times?

Friend#2: Because! I just loveth to speaketh unto you oh great Betty. Betty Betty Betty. You are so wonderful. BETTY YOU'RE WONDERFUL!

Friend#1: Okay . . . Well . . . Thank you . . . Umm. You know you don't have to yell, right?

Friend#2: NO Betty! I MUST YELL! Because I want the WHOLE WORLD to know that I am a friend of wonderful Betty's and Betty is a wonderful friend to ME!!!!

Friend#1: Wow. Okay. So, Bob, what are some of your favorite things about me?

Friend#2: Betty. Oh Betty. Great and glorious Betty Betty Betty, very wonderful Betty, I like you because you are so very Betty. . . . Betty Betty.

Friend#1: Umm... Bob? That doesn't make a lot of sense though. I'm kind of wondering if you really know anything about me. Why don't you tell me something you could have only learned because we were really close, something you would only know because you were listen...

Friend#2: (Bob interrupts Betty, yelling louder than ever.) OH BETTY! Betty, Betty, you are such a good friend. How wonderful you are to me, Betty! With your gifts of chocolate chip cookies and your presence OH BETTY, BETTY, BETTY, BETTY!

Bob begins to pace back and forth, waving his arms and saying Betty's name repeatedly, as she shrugs her shoulders and exits the stage.

Professor Talks-too-much: That will be quite enough, Bob. You've done quite enough, ever so much more really than any of us could have hoped or wished or wanted or even thought about. REALLY, Bob, thank you, you have gone above the highest height and beyond the farthest point anyone should ever be going. Now friends, acquaintances, younger disciples of the Lord most high who are following in His way, we will get to the point, the principle, the big reason behind all of this but first—a question. Who was the better friend in this skit, scenario, summary of characters that we just so recently happened upon? (Betty!) Of course, it was Betty! Who else but Betty? Betty knew Bob best, didn't she? So much better than Bob knew Betty did Betty know him that I don't know why Bob would bother to call himself a friend of Betty at all. His yelling her name repeatedly so that others could hear him and saying empty nice things didn't matter much because he never took the time to listen to what she had to say, or to actually enter into a conversation with him. So it is, my peeps, my fam, my homies, my dudes, with us and the Lord. God wants us to talk to Him. Not just yell His name and say empty words of praise but to really talk to Him. To tell Him what is on our hearts and to listen for what His heart is saying back to us. God wants us to truly talk to Him.

To communicate with Him truly, not just yell things in His face. Well, God wouldn't like that any better than Betty when Bob did it.

One of the most important things to remember about teaching children is the importance of communicating solid, foundational truth in a fun, informative way.

Conclusion

“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger” (Psalm 8:2).

We read in Psalms that the praise of children silences the mouth of Satan. What comes out of a child's mouth can provide supernatural protection for their entire family. The words that children say are powerful, and it is our duty to train them to use those words to the best of their ability. To further God's kingdom through them, and to become more like them so that we might be a part of it.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Answer the following questions.

1. What are the four things which, though little, are exceedingly wise?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
 - D. _____

2. Who is the kingdom of Heaven built upon?

3. When we offend a child, who do we also offend?

4. What is “the minute rule”?

5. List five of the ten tips given for teaching children.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

6. What five “p’s” are practical points for children’s ministry?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

7. What is one of the most important things to remember about teaching children?

8. What does the praise of children do to the enemy?

Missionary Spotlight: **Larry and Ruth Blake**

By Larry Blake

Larry Blake was born in Neoga, Illinois, to Lawrence and Irene Ferguson Blake. He attended the Neoga schools and graduated from Neoga High in May, 1957. He attended the United Pentecostal Church in Neoga from a very young age. He began preaching at thirteen years old. Before graduating he began holding revivals in local area churches and launched out into full-time evangelistic ministry.

During Ruth's senior year of high school, she was offered a sponsored radio program on a Detroit station with promise of a later recording contract. After prayer, she turned this down feeling it would detract from her walk with God. Since childhood she had felt a distinct call to missions and hoped to see this happen.

After Ruth's high school graduation, she spent the summer in Texas with relatives. She and her cousins formed a girls' quartet. They evangelized together and were scheduled for revivals through late summer. However, Ruth had to return home to Michigan because of her mother's serious illness.



Larry and Ruth Blake
1983

On August 16, 1958 Larry Blake and Ruth Bolinger were married in Lansing, Michigan's, Eastside Tabernacle by Pastor Hebert Starr. After seventeen months of full-time traveling in revival ministry, they were called to pastor the First Pentecostal Church in Cobden, Illinois, in January 1960.

During an Illinois District camp meeting in Murphysboro, Illinois, the Blakes took up the challenge to move to Chicago for a home missions work. They went to Chicago to get jobs and secure a home for the family. After relocating in



The Larry Blake Family
1973

the south side of Chicago, they received a \$1,200.00 gift from the United Pentecostal Church to help with the expense of the church opening.

In the fall 1968, the Robert K. Rodenbushes were appointed as foreign missionaries to Ghana, West Africa. Larry Blake was then elected pastor in Cutler, Illinois. Under their leadership that church built a beautiful new building.

In the 1973 General Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, the Blakes received missionary appointment to Liberia, West Africa. They arrived in Liberia in 1975. In 1978, shortly before time for furlough, Brother Blake was asked to consider a transfer of his appointment from Liberia to Ghana. This was agreed to and the Blakes returned to Africa, arriving in Ghana on New Year's Day, 1979.

After two terms in Ghana, the Blakes came home for deputation and were asked to be furlough replacements for the Robert Kellys in Scotland. It was agreed to and furlough was interrupted and Blakes were asked to be furlough replacements in New Zealand while the Robert Addingtons were home on furlough. The Blakes spent a year there.

At the end of that year, Ruth's father, K. E. Bolinger, called to ask if the Blakes would take the church in Belleville, Illinois, as he was in ill health. The Blakes were unanimously elected to the First Pentecostal Church. There, they bought acreage in O'Fallon, Illinois, and built another beautiful church known as Christ the King Apostolic Church of O'Fallon. Pastor Blake retired in May 2015 after fifty-eight years of United Pentecostal ministry. They pastored twenty-four of these years in Belleville and O'Fallon and eighteen years under Foreign Missions appointment.

They are blessed with three children, sons, Kevin Blake, who pastors in Bay City, Texas; Jonathan Blake, who pastors in Pana, Illinois, and daughter, Camille Blake who lives in Fairview Heights, Illinois. They are proud grandparents to

seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. In 2015, they celebrated their fifty-seventh wedding anniversary.