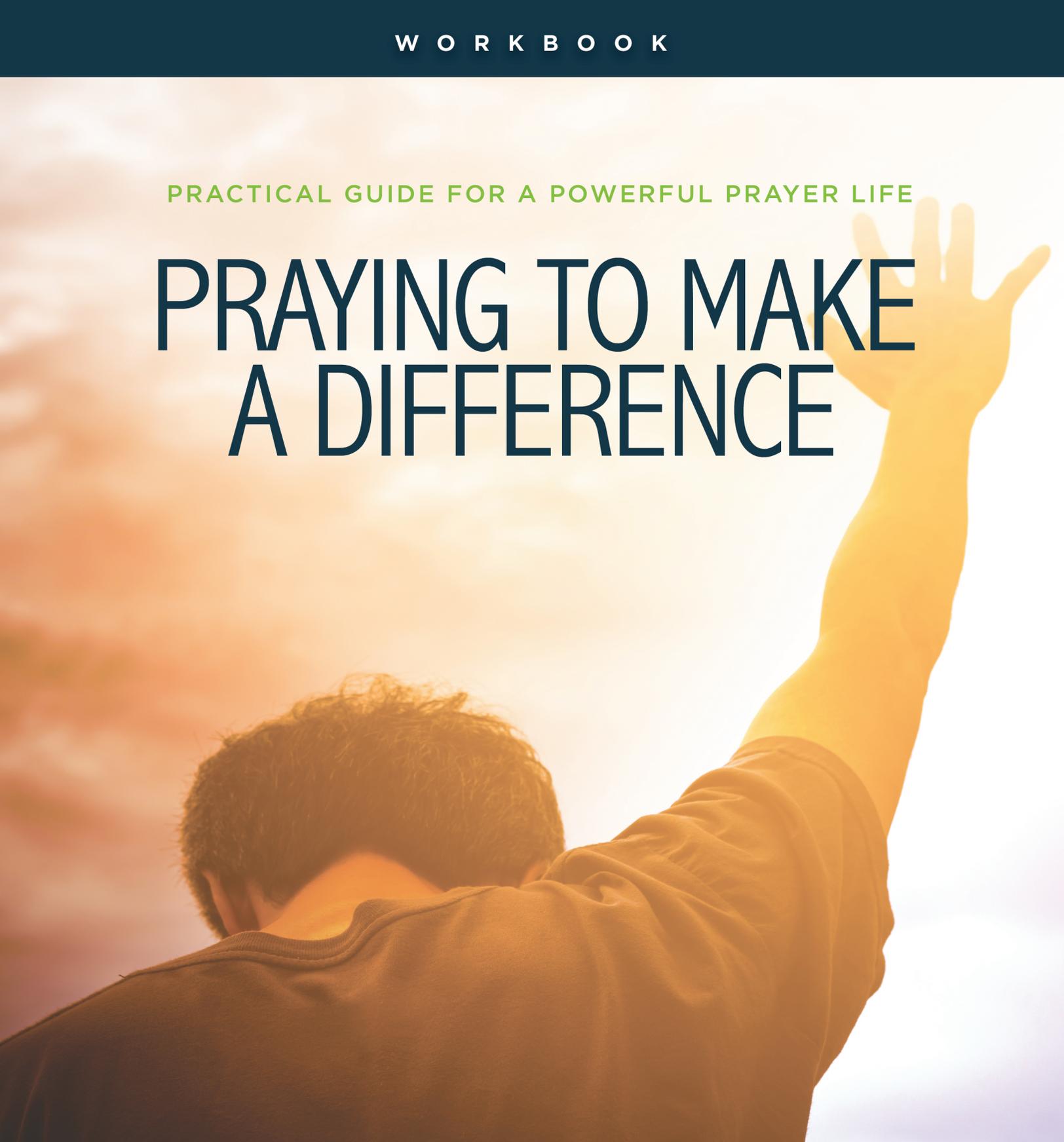


PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR A POWERFUL PRAYER LIFE

PRAYING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE



TANDEM
PRAYER

PRAYING THE HEART AND WILL OF GOD

W O R K B O O K

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR A POWERFUL PRAYER LIFE

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PRAYING THE HEART AND WILL OF GOD

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Unit 1

OPENING THE DOOR TO AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE

Introduction and Overview

SCRIPTURE

“Lord, teach us to pray.” *[Luke 11:1]*

THE GOAL OF THIS STUDY

If Jesus’ disciples, who lived with him personally, needed to be taught to pray, surely we do too. Our goal is to learn from our Master Teacher what is needed if we want our prayers to make a difference—an eternal difference—in our lives and the lives of those we love.

This involves far more than learning words to say. Effective prayers (or prayers that make a difference) are born in the heart of the personal relationship with God, a relationship that is cultivated, maintained and enjoyed through prayer. We can’t have one without the other: our prayers make a difference when we live in spiritual intimacy with God.

That, then, is what this course is all about—helping us experience greater depths in our personal relationship with God, greater heights in the effectiveness of our prayers.

DO YOU HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

Since the goal of this course is to help you experience greater depths in your personal relationship with God, it is essential that you have already trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and that you acknowledge him to be the Lord of your life. If you are not sure that you have settled this matter with God, prayerfully reflect on the following scriptures:

Romans 3:23—All have sinned.

Romans 6:23—Eternal life is a free gift from God.

Romans 5:8—Because of love, Jesus paid the death penalty for your sins.

Romans 10:9-10—Confess Jesus as Lord and believe God raised him from the dead.

Romans 10:13—Ask God to save you and he will.

To place your faith in Jesus and receive his gift of eternal life you must—

Recognize that you are a sinner in need of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Confess (agree with God) about your sins.

Repent of your sins (turn from sin to God, relying on God’s strength to help you).

Ask Jesus to save you by his grace.

Turn over the rule in your life to Jesus; let him be your Lord.

If you need help with this decision, ask your group facilitator, your pastor or a Christian friend.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS OF MATERIAL

To establish and maintain a relationship with the Lord that results in a powerful and effective prayer life, we must learn from Jesus. The course will cover Jesus' teaching on prayer as he presented it—chronologically and sequentially. Step by step, he teaches how to build a solid foundation for a life of prayer that is rooted and grounded in a personal relationship with him.

Key scriptures will include—

Units 2-7: The Lord's Prayer, the model prayer of Matthew 6:9-13

Unit 8: Persistence, Luke 11, 18; the prayer promises of Matthew 18, Mark 11, John 14-16.

THE WORKBOOK IS DIVIDED INTO EIGHT SECTIONS.

Unit 1: Opening the Door to an Effective Prayer Life

Unit 2: Spending Time with God

Unit 3: Knowing the God We Worship

Unit 4: Yielding to God's Direction

Unit 5: Asking for God's Provision

Unit 6: Seeking God's Forgiveness

Unit 7: Trusting God's Protection

Unit 8: Expecting God's Response

EACH WEEKLY UNIT INCLUDES

- A weekly lesson based on Jesus' teaching on prayer.
- Five daily devotional studies.
- "Food for Thought and Discussion" questions to be answered for group discussion.
- NOTE: If you have a week in which you fall behind, come to the group discussion anyway! You will always have a review of the lesson on the video, which will prepare you to take part in the discussion—and you'll gain much by being there!

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What did Jim and Kaye Johns say in their testimony that you related to? In what way have you had similar feelings or experiences? How have they had an impact on your prayer life?
2. Think about someone you have known or known of, who has a powerful prayer life. It might be someone like Billy Graham or your pastor, or maybe someone you have known personally. Why do you consider them to be effective pray-ers?
3. In what way might that person directly or indirectly affect your prayer life or walk with God? For instance—
 - Have you ever considered that person as a role model?
 - Or has his or her prayer life been something you wanted for yourself?
 - Has it been an encouragement—or challenge—to you?

4. There are many who have never known anyone considered to be an effective pray-er—
If you have never known someone you consider to be a person of prayer, do you wish you had? What difference do you think it might have made in your life?

5. Case study—

Let's say you are a Sunday school teacher and your class is composed of young married couples, most of them with babies or small children. Typically, both parents are worn out from tending the children, keeping the home, working long hours. You can tell they are dealing with a lot of stress and it's beginning to show in their relationships.

You want to encourage these couples to have a daily time for prayer and reading the Bible because you know they will be better able to cope, if they each have a close relationship with God. Most agree in theory, but feel they can't add another commitment to their exhausting schedules. How would you encourage them? What would you suggest?

6. If you could change one thing about your prayer life today, what would it be?
7. What are some of the things that might stand in your way?

One of the great problems in prayer experienced by believers is the problem of varying emotions. If I prayed only when I felt like it, I would pray very little.

...If the emotions reign, the prayer life will greatly suffer. If we wait for the good time, the high feelings, the great emotional moments, we will grow discouraged. The emotions are ever influenced by too many things which are continually changing.

...The will is the key! Unlike emotions, it has the capacity to act independently of feelings. ...We must will to pray because the Word of God has both invited and commanded us to pray.

...When I will to respond to the will of God as set forth in the Word of God, God's power is released to perform that which he has willed in me. God wants me to pray. He has commanded me to pray. With my will I can choose to pray and my will throws God's will into gear and I pray in his power!

Jack Taylor, *Prayer: Life's Limitless Reach*, pp. 125-127,
Broadman Press, Nashville, TN 1977.



Unit 2

SPENDING TIME WITH GOD

*Building Any Relationship Takes Time,
One on One.*

SCRIPTURE

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” [Matt. 6:6]

INSIGHTS FROM JESUS’ TEACHING ON PRAYER

Jesus is the one who teaches us how to pray. In the Old Testament we are given many examples of prayers, but no specific instructions or guidelines for prayer. Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, began teaching his disciples how to pray. He did it in a sequential way, giving them the step-by-step essentials for building a solid foundation for a life of prayer—

- The importance of the quiet time... [Matt. 6:6]
- The need to be focused in prayer... [Matt. 6:7]
- How to pray, a pattern for prayer... [Matt. 6:9-13]
- Caution on unforgiveness... [Matt. 6:14-15]
- Encouragement to ask, seek, knock... [Matt. 7:7-8]
- Affirmation of God’s nature and desire to give... [Matt. 7:9-11]

Later by perhaps several months—

- Agreeing with others in prayer... [Matt. 18:19]

Once we have learned and are practicing the basics of prayer, we are led into the early stages of our personal relationship with God. As we grow in our understanding of him, as we begin to experience his faithfulness, we are ready for some of Jesus’ more advanced teaching about prayer—

- Persistence in prayer... [Luke 11:5-8]
- Asking for the Holy Spirit... [Luke 11:13]
- Always praying and not giving up... [Luke 18:1]
- Being bold in our prayers... [Luke 18:2-5]
- Crying out to him day and night... [Luke 18:7]

Finally, at the end of his ministry, Jesus left us many incredible prayer promises, originally given to his 12 disciples and underscored by the Apostle John in his epistle, 1 John. These are not promises for casual Christians, but for those today who have walked with him, who know the cost of following him, who are willing to deny self and “abide in the Vine.” [John 15:7] These promises tell us we may have *whatever we ask, if*—each promise has a condition. The conditions include—

- Having true faith...[*Matt. 21:21-22, Mark 11:22-24*]
- Asking in Jesus' name, in his character...[*John 14:13-14; 16:23-24,26*]
- Praying for things that will advance his kingdom...[*John 14:12-13*]
- Offering prayers that will glorify the Father...[*John 14:14; 15:8*]
- Abiding in the Vine...[*John 15:7*]
- Having Jesus' words [teachings] abiding in us...[*John 15:7*]
- Living lives that bear lasting fruit...[*John 15:16*]
- Experiencing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit...[*John 14:23-26*]

These last promises, that we can have “whatever we ask,” are later underscored by the Apostle John, who wrote we can have whatever we ask when we—

- have hearts that do not condemn us...[*1 John 3:21*]
- live as obedient and pleasing to the Lord...[*1 John 3:22*]
- pray according to his will... [*1 John 5:14-15*]

There are no shortcuts to the prayer promises Jesus gave his disciples in his last hours with them. Jesus taught them about prayer step-by-step, and that is how we are to master prayer. Those who are just beginning to have a consistent prayer life, and to discover how to walk daily in God's presence, are not yet ready to persist in prayer, to come boldly and courageously before the throne. That faith, that confidence, takes time to develop.

Jesus teaches us to begin with the basics, to lay a strong foundation for our prayer lives. The first step is to have a daily quiet time, out of which we are able to know God personally and to seek his empowerment to live the life we must live if we want him to hear and answer our prayers in a powerful way.

GIVING GOD UNDIVIDED TIME AND ATTENTION

Jesus' first teaching on prayer precedes the Lord's Prayer, or model prayer, of Matthew 6. He said to his disciples “...go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” [*Matt. 6:6*]

These verses do not say go “daily,” but his model prayer, which immediately follows, includes “give us *this day* our *daily* bread.” [*Matt. 6:11, emphasis added*] It is important to set aside time daily with God, time in which we focus on prayer and reading the Bible, time when we are not trying to think about or do anything else. We call this our daily “quiet time,” though others may refer to it as their “morning watch,” or something similar. It is in such a time that our personal relationship with God develops, that we learn to hear his voice—not audibly, but certainly.

It is in our daily quiet time that God becomes a real person to us and that we develop the sensitivity to recognize his presence with us as we move through the day. We can pray without having a consistent quiet time, but we cannot know him in a personal way without it. If at any time we realize we are not sensing God's presence in our lives, we must come back to this first, essential step that Jesus taught and ask ourselves—are we spending meaningful time every day with God? Are we giving God undivided time and attention?

BEGINNING YOUR DAILY ASSIGNMENTS

Beginning with this unit and continuing through the next seven weeks, you will have five daily devotional messages to read.

It is appropriate that this week's unit is entitled "Spending Time with God," because that is the most important benefit you will receive from completing this study. If you are new to the practice of spending a few minutes with God every day, the daily assignments in the workbook will provide a consistent basis for that time. Our prayer is that by the end of the study, God will have become so real to you, that you will want to make it a habit to spend time with him every day for the rest of your life. We believe he wants that, too.

Some of you may already be spending time with God each day. So much the better! These assignments will help you assess where you are in your prayer life and relationship with God. They will provide a way for you to take whatever next step God sets before you, in order that you may walk even more deeply with him.

You can be sure that God will honor any commitment that you make to give him time. Make it a matter of prayer, and watch how he will enable you to keep that commitment!

DAILY DEVOTIONAL MESSAGES

The daily devotional messages are from the PrayerPower radio series, and they are written by Kaye Johns, who also voices them on the air. For that reason they are written in the first person, from Kaye's point of view, and many of them contain parts of her personal testimony.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each daily assignment includes "Food for Thought and Discussion" questions. These questions have no right or wrong answers, but they will help you reflect on your prayer life and your walk with the Lord. In group discussions you and others in your group will begin to see how many concerns you share in common, which will be encouraging for everyone.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT EACH WEEK

Beginning with this unit, each week you will read the opening lesson and the five daily devotional messages, and complete the "Food for Thought and Discussion" questions. It will always be best if you are able to do your daily assignments one day at a time, rather than doubling up, to allow time to reflect on what you are learning or experiencing.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Did anything that was shared on the video seem to apply to your experience? In what way?
2. In what way have you ever been intimidated by others who knew more about prayer, more about the Bible, more about God than you did? (*page 8, question #1*)
3. In what ways would you like God to be more real to you today? (*page 8, question #3*)

4. In what ways do you think living in a personal relationship with God is different from knowing scripture? (page 9, question #1)
5. What are some of the essentials required in building a personal relationship with another person? (page 10, question #1)
6. John 10:3-5 says that Jesus' sheep will know his voice. Has there ever been a time when you were seeking God's guidance and just didn't feel you had heard from him? Do you think the level of your personal experience with God may have something to do with it? In what way? (page 11, question #2)
7. How has God invited you to know him through the years? Can you look back over your life and recognize opportunities he has given you to come into an ever-deepening relationship with him? (page 12, question #1)
8. What is the one most important thing God has impressed on your heart this week? It may have been something in a daily devotional or Food for Thought and Discussion question, or something that was said during our discussion just now.

...God Himself pursues a love relationship with you. He is the One who takes the initiative to bring you into this kind of relationship. He created you for a love relationship with Himself. That is the very purpose of your life. This love relationship can and should be real and personal to you. ...If you cannot describe your relationship with God by saying that you love Him with all your being, then you need to ask the Holy Spirit to bring you into that kind of relationship.

...If I were to try to summarize the entire Old Testament, it would be expressed in this verse: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." [Deut. 6:4-5]

This heart-cry of God is expressed throughout the Old Testament. The essence of the New Testament is the same. Quoting from Deuteronomy, Jesus said the greatest commandment in the law is: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." [Mark 12:30]

Everything depends on this! Everything in your Christian Life, everything about knowing Him and experiencing Him, everything about knowing His will, depends on the quality of your love relationship to God. If that is not right, nothing in your life will be right.

...A love relationship with God is more important than any other single factor in your life.

Unit Two: Day One

IS IT EVER TOO LATE TO LEARN TO PRAY?

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him...

Abram fell face down. [Gen. 17:1,3]

Is it ever too late to learn to *really* pray, in such a way that you know you have connected with God, to see answers to your prayers? Of course it is never too late! I'm one who did not learn to pray, who did not even know the fundamentals of prayer, until I was 46 years old. In 1988 my husband, Jim, and I, although we had regularly attended church in the past, had not been in church for two years. Friends visiting from out of town prompted us to visit a church we had never been to, and the timing was the Lord's—a 13-week course in prayer was being offered at the church, and we enrolled.

In that course, I felt I was out of my league. I had never read the Bible. I had never memorized scripture. I had never prayed aloud, except to read prayers in unison with a group—or to bless the food before we ate. I had never prayed with anyone other than very young children. I had never prayed on a consistent basis. But God took me where I was, and began to bring me to where he wants me to be. Every day is a new experience with him. Every day he draws me closer.

That prayer course was the beginning of the greatest discovery of my life—that our God is real and personal, that he wants us to know him in an intimate way, that he will teach us to pray in order that we can. No matter where you are in your Christian experience, no matter what your age, God is waiting for you, to draw you closer, to change your life through prayer.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. In what way have you ever been intimidated by others who knew more about prayer, or the Bible, or about God than you did?

2. In what ways have you grown in your prayer life, in your understanding of the Bible or in your experience with God over the past few years? As you think about it, if you conclude that you are too new or inexperienced as a Christian to respond, in what way would you like to grow in these areas over the next few weeks of this course?

3. In what ways would you like God to be more real to you today?

One of the beautiful truths of our experience with God is that the more we know of him, the better we want to know him. The better we learn to know him, the more time we want to spend with him. There is always more to know and experience of him, always another part of his nature to love.

Unit Two: Day Two
INFORMATION—OR A RELATIONSHIP?

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. [1 Sam. 3:7]

There were times in my life when I went to early morning church services every day for weeks—but I realize now, I did not know God personally. I did not even know that I could. It is easy to learn *about* God without knowing him, just as we can learn about the President without being personally acquainted. We can become experts, quoting Bible verses, giving all the right answers, all without having a personal relationship with God.

I used to wonder about that. When I would hear people say they had a personal relationship with God, I didn't know whether to believe them or not. But I have learned that it is true, and it does not just happen. Building a relationship with God takes effort and energy, just like relationships with people. It takes time spent alone with him every day in prayer and in his Word, the Bible.

The trouble is that many people never really learn to pray or develop the discipline to do it consistently. It isn't that they can't pray at all, but their prayers never seem to go beyond an elementary level—and that limits their experience with God. They never discover that he is willing to reveal himself to them.

Even Jesus' disciples realized they needed to be taught to pray, and they asked for help [Luke 11:1]. So must we, for when we do, we find he is more than willing to teach us what we need to know.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. In what ways do you think living in a personal relationship with God is different from knowing scripture?

2. How do you think understanding the Bible might relate to knowing God in a personal way?

3. How important is discipline to our prayer lives? Is there an area of discipline in your prayer life with which you are struggling today (e.g. finding time to pray)? Or, that you have managed to conquer in God's strength? What is it?

A friend of ours realized he had to choose: either his favorite evening sports round up, which was on TV from 11:00-12:00 midnight, or his early morning quiet time—because he couldn't get up early enough for a meaningful quiet time if he stayed up until midnight. He learned to live without the sports report, and drew much closer to God.

Unit Two: Day Three

IS A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD POSSIBLE?

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me. [Rev. 3:20]

Is it really possible to have a personal relationship with God? To know him as a real person, even though we can't see or touch him? To hear him clearly and directly, even though he doesn't speak audibly? It is not only possible, it's *essential*. It is the essence of the Spirit-filled [Eph. 5:18], abiding [John 15:1-8] life that seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness [Matt. 6:33].

I did not understand that I could have a personal relationship with the Lord until I was 46 years old. I would not have experienced it then, if I had not finally begun to have a regular quiet time that included prayer and devotional Bible reading. Without consistent time spent with God, it is impossible to have a relationship of any depth with him. And without an in-depth relationship, we cannot have the powerful, effective prayer life that most of us would like to experience.

It does not matter how late in life we decide we want to know the Lord in a personal way. If we are willing and disciplined enough to spend time with him, God will draw us continuously closer to himself. This involves a growing understanding of who he is, and how much he loves us. It leads to prayer that becomes two-way communication. God becomes real. No one else can tell us what that is like; we have to experience him for ourselves. The amazing thing is that he allows it, that he encourages it, that he desires it.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the essentials required in building a personal relationship with another person?

2. In what ways do you think these same things might apply to building a personal relationship with God?

3. What has been your experience regarding a personal relationship with God? Have there been times when you knew you were closer to him than at other times? What made the difference?

God will never force himself on us, but we will find him waiting if we set our hearts to seek him. We build our relationship with him just as we do with any other person—by spending time together, talking, listening, enjoying each other's company.

Unit Two: Day Four

HOW DOES GOD WANT US TO KNOW HIM?

If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. [John 14:7]

How does God want us to know him? Personally. Intimately. Most of my life, if someone had asked, I would have said he wants us to know him through the Bible, meaning factual knowledge. That is true. But factual knowledge does not build a personal relationship, only experience does that. And we understand from the words that are used, it is “experiential” knowledge that he wants us to have.

There are several Greek words that mean “to know.” One is *ginosko*—to have an intimate, continuing relationship with one whom we greatly value. It is a desire that comes from the heart, not the mind, suggesting conscious, progressive knowledge. It implies an active relationship.

Jesus put it this way in John 17:3: “Now this is eternal life: that they may *know* you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent [*italics added*].” Jesus is praying for his disciples, and the word used is *ginosko*. It might read, “...that they may know you—that they may have an active, continuing, progressively intimate relationship with you—the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

Eternal life with him begins at the moment of salvation. Right now, if we are saved, we are able to live in a personal love relationship with God, in which he allows us to know him in an increasingly intimate way. The question is, do we? And if not, why not?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. John uses the word *ginosko*—to know through experience—in other passages when he quotes Jesus. Read John 10:14-15, 27-28 and note below: what kind of relationship does Jesus want with us when he describes himself as shepherd, us as sheep?

2. John 10:3-5 says that Jesus’ sheep will know his voice. Has there ever been a time when you were seeking God’s guidance and just didn’t feel you had heard from him? Do you think the level of your personal experience with God may have something to do with it? In what way?

3. Has knowing God, in the sense of *ginosko*—personal experience—been the essence of your spiritual walk? How much of our experience with God is up to us?

Food for thought for each of us: What would Jesus say to us today about our relationship with him? Would he be pleased that we are enjoying an active, continuing, progressively intimate relationship with him?

Unit Two: Day Five

WHO PURSUES THE LOVE RELATIONSHIP?

I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. [Jer. 24:7]

Are we the ones pursuing God, or does he pursue us? We know that God has created us for a love relationship. And we know our responsibility is to confess our sins, to live lives of obedience, and to be willing to spend time in prayer and Bible study. But apart from that, is there anything *we* can do to make the relationship happen?

Let's look at a couple of scriptures. In Romans 3, we read "...there is no one who seeks God." [Rom. 3:11] And in John 6, "No one can come to me [meaning Jesus], unless the Father who sent me draws him... [John 6:44]." We're not seeking, God is drawing. Isn't that true in the Bible? Didn't God come to Noah? to Moses? to Samuel? Didn't Jesus come to his disciples? to Paul? The Bible tells us God is the same "yesterday, today and forever"? [Heb. 13:8] God does not change.

Today, God still takes the initiative. He invites us into the relationship. He allows us to know him personally, through his Holy Spirit. God must really want us to know him. He must love us more than we can imagine.

How valuable does that make you feel? That the Lord of lords and King of kings loves you enough to allow you to know him through a continuing, personal love relationship?

Does that make a difference in the way you pray? Should it?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. How has God invited you to know him through the years? Can you look back over your life and realize the opportunities he has given you to come into an ever-deepening relationship with him? Note a time when you responded and drew closer to him—

2. Can you think of a time when you realize you didn't respond to God's prompting to draw closer to him? Describe it—

3. Do you sense that this course at this time in your life is an opportunity to draw closer to God? In what way?

Our spiritual walk with God might be seen as a series of plateaus; periodically, the Lord goes ahead, then reaches down to draw us closer. If we respond, we'll come to know him better, to love and experience him more than we ever have. Over time, so long as we respond, he will reach for us again and again.



Unit 3

KNOWING THE GOD WE WORSHIP

*The Relationship Is Intimate, Personal—
and Available.*

SCRIPTURE

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...’”
[*Matt. 6:9*]

JESUS BEGINS TO TEACH US HOW TO PRAY.

In Unit 2, we considered that the first and most foundational instruction Jesus gives us on building a prayer life is his admonition to have a daily quiet time:

“When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.” [*Matt. 6:6*]

Jesus, being the excellent Teacher that he is, doesn’t leave it there. He gives us specific guidelines to follow as a pattern for daily prayer. He leaves no question as to what we should pray when we “go into our room and close the door.” His first principle of prayer has to do with worship:

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...’”
[*Matt. 6:9*]

OUR FATHER

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray to God as “our Father,” he was introducing a fundamental truth about prayer: we must be children of God, if we are to call him Father [*Rom. 8:14-16, 1 John 3:1*]. We become God’s children by being born again by God’s Spirit [*John 3:5-7*]. We must have been adopted into God’s family through Christ, receiving the Spirit of sonship [*Rom. 8:14-16*], for Jesus alone is “the way and the truth and the life,” and no one comes to the Father except through him [*John 14:6*]. It is through Jesus that we have access to the Father by one Spirit [*Eph. 2:18*]. If our prayers are to be heard, we must come through Jesus and be given access through his Spirit.

And what a picture Jesus gives us of the heavenly Father we come to in prayer. In this same Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals that it is our Father’s nature to be generous, to desire to give what we ask:

“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” [*Matt. 7:9-11*]

This comforting truth is reinforced by James:

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights....” [James 1:17]

In Christ we are adopted by our generous, gift-giving Father God, and no one can separate us from his love [Rom. 8:39]. We come to him as Almighty God, *Jehovah*, our Most High God, our Sovereign Lord and Master—but we are privileged to come to him personally as children to a loving Father.

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME.

As we come to our Father in daily prayer, Jesus tells us we must first pause to hallow his name. The word “hallow” means to set something apart as holy, to signify that it is the opposite of common. When we hallow God’s name, we reflect not only on who he is, but who we are in relation to him. We come to the place of prayer humbled by the realization that we must come as little children, totally dependent upon our Father, knowing that he is no less than Almighty God.

Hallowing our Father’s name encompasses more than simply worshiping or honoring him—we are to know the One we worship [John 4:22-23]. In Biblical times a person’s name represented his nature, his character, the facets of his personality. So it is with the names of God. Throughout scripture there are hundreds of names, titles and descriptions of God the Father, Jesus his Son and the Holy Spirit—and each one reveals something about who he is and who he desires to be for us at any given moment of our lives.

As we seek to live in personal relationship with our Lord, we come to experience many different aspects of God’s nature. We learn to know him as our Provider when unexpected financial troubles come, as our Resting Place in stress, as our Healer when we have been ill. Our opening prayer of worship becomes an acknowledgement of that growing relationship, an expression of adoration and love, which pours from grateful hearts. The better we know him, the more our worship means—to him and to us. We do not tell him *that* we worship and adore him, we share with him *why* we worship and adore him. It is a growing and unfolding relationship.

Though we may “pray without ceasing” in the busyness of our days, Jesus said we must first give priority to worshiping God. The time we spend every day in worshiping our Father is essential, a moment when we want to be careful not to rush into his presence. In worship we are reverently approaching a holy God, giving him priority time and commitment every day.

It is after such moments of worship that we can pray through the day as informally or urgently as needed, because we have honored God by “hallowing his name.” Through our worship, we have clearly acknowledged to God our Father what he means to us. In expressing our love and adoration, we have demonstrated his importance in our lives.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Did anything shared on the video give you a new perspective on worship? In what way?
2. Has your understanding of what it means to worship changed over the years? In what way(s)?
(page 16, question #1)

3. In what ways is your personal worship an expression of your love for God and the reality of his presence in your life? (page 17, question #2)
4. Why do you think it might be important to follow a systematic plan to read through the Bible? (page 18, question #1)
5. Think about where you are in your knowledge of the Bible today versus five years ago, versus last year. How do you feel about the progress you have made? (page 19, question #1)
6. In what ways do you think a plan like Tim LaHaye's might make it easy for someone who has never read through the Bible to be successful? Have you ever tried to read the Bible from beginning to end and given up? (page 20, devotional message)
7. As you reflect on this week's study, the video and our discussion together, what is the most important thing you expect to apply to your own prayer life?

"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." [1 John 1:3]

Here, indeed, is the whole object, the ultimate, the goal of all Christian experience and all Christian endeavour. This, beyond any question, is the central message of the Christian gospel and the Christian faith. ...[It] is the very acme of Christian experience and at the same time it is a goal; it is the whole object of Christian experience and of Christian faith and teaching.

...the Christian life is not essentially an application of teaching; it is a fellowship, a communion with God Himself, nothing less.

...I am anxious to impress and stress this, that to hold the right views, to subscribe to the right doctrine, even to be defenders of the right doctrine, does not of necessity make people Christians. No, while the Christian must hold right views and doctrines, that is not the essence of the Christian life and Christian position. Rather, it is to have fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

...one of the best ways in which we can test whether we are truly in fellowship and communion with God is to examine our prayer life. How much prayer life is there in my life? How often do I pray; do I find freedom in prayer, do I delight in prayer; or is prayer a wearisome task; do I never know enlargement and liberty in it? For what we are told here is that the Christian in Christ has been brought into fellowship and communion with God, and as you read the psalmists you will find that they enjoyed it, to them it was the supreme thing.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Fellowship with God*, pp.77-84, Crossway Books, Great Shelford, Cambridge 1993.

Unit Three, Day One

HOW DO WE HALLOW GOD’S NAME?

Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. [1 Chron. 16:29b]

Jesus taught his disciples to pray by introducing a model prayer that began, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” [Matt. 6:9] When we hallow the name of God, we give him honor, we reverence him for who he is. Each of his names represents a different facet of his nature, his character, his attributes. Jesus is teaching that our prayer time should begin with a time of worship, praise and adoration of all that God is.

Sometimes in the busyness of our schedules, our prayer time is rushed. But I wonder—is it possible for us to hallow the Lord’s name in a hurry? It’s certainly possible for us to pray on the run. But is that how we hallow the Lord’s name, worshiping him for who he is, marveling at his character, amazed at his attributes, stunned by his glory?

What if we had a chance to visit heaven? As we approach his throne, the Lord is surrounded by 24 elders and four living creatures and more than a hundred million angels [Rev. 4:4,6b; 5:11]. Would we worship him in all his glory? We are addressing that same high and holy God every time we breathe a prayer. Is it possible to understand that, and not begin our day with a time of worship, praise and adoration? Can we know who he is and not pause to hallow his name?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Has your understanding of what it means to worship God changed over the years? In what way(s)?

2. What impact might having a personal relationship with God have on our worship?

3. In what ways, other than the physical aspects of the church choir or the large sanctuary, is your personal worship different from worshiping with others in a service at your church?

In Exodus 33 we’re told, “Moses always erected the sacred tent (the ‘Tent for meeting with God’ he called it) far outside camp, and everyone who wanted to consult with Jehovah went out there.” [Ex. 33:7, TLB] While it is true that today we are free to worship and pray at any time, in any place, it is also true that we need a sacred tent of our own, a place to consult with Jehovah, a place for worship and prayer. We call it our quiet time.

Unit Three, Day Two

WORSHIP THE LORD IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH.

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. [John 4:24]

Jesus taught that we must worship in truth when he spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well— “...a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth....” [John 4:23]

To worship in truth certainly means to worship in the truth of scripture, understanding what it tells us of the God we worship, but it is much more than that. Worshiping in truth is to worship God in personal *koinonia* fellowship, the abiding spiritual intimacy that Jesus wants with each of us.

We know that because Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” [John 14:6] He didn’t say he would teach us the truth, he said he *is* the Truth. Through his Holy Spirit, whom he identified as the Spirit of truth [John 14:16-17], he lives in us and through us.

In that abiding relationship, our Lord is constantly revealing himself to his obedient children. As we live in close, personal fellowship with him, we are able to know the truth of who he is. As we know him in a personal way, we begin to love him and to worship him in the light of our personal experience with him. Worship in truth becomes an expression of our love, based on his real presence in our lives, and our knowing him in a personal way.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is knowing and understanding the truth of scripture important to our worship?

2. In what way(s) is your personal worship an expression of your love for God and the reality of his presence in your life?

3. Why would Jesus say, “I am the way, the truth and the life” instead of “I’ll show you the way, the truth and the life”? Does it change your perception of his role in your life?

Several years ago, when I was feeling exhausted and overwhelmed, I read, “Who has done such mighty deeds, directing the affairs of generations of mankind as they march by? It is I, the Lord, the first and last; I alone am he.” [Isa. 41:4, TLB] To this day, when I am feeling overwhelmed or discouraged, I reach for Isaiah. Nothing lifts my spirit more than contemplating the majesty of the Lord. It is that sense of worship and adoration that helps me focus on him instead of the circumstances of life. I need the sense of his bigness, his ability to keep everything under his control. Do you suppose that’s one of the reasons why he wants us to worship him?

Unit Three, Day Three

WHY IS READING THE BIBLE SO ESSENTIAL TO WORSHIP?

I meditate on your precepts, and consider your ways. [Psalm 119:15]

We need to know the God we are worshiping. Unless we read systematically through the entire Bible every year or so, we are in danger of worshiping the God of our favorite verses, God as we want him to be, rather than God as he is revealed from Genesis through Revelation. If we do not read the complete Word of God, we cannot understand the whole truth of who he is. It is comforting to see him as the God of love and mercy, but he is also a righteous and just God who will not be mocked.

From beginning to end, the Bible is a revelation of Jesus. The Old Testament prophesies his coming, the New Testament details his life and teaching. We have the printed Word of God—inspired by the Holy Spirit as it was written, interpreted by the Holy Spirit yet today, that we may know the truth of who God is. If we are not studying the Bible for ourselves, how do we know we are worshiping the true God?

We can worship a God we don't understand, One we haven't taken the time to know personally, but is such worship honoring to him? Does such worship hallow his name?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think it might be important to follow a systematic plan to read through the Bible?

2. In what ways would it be possible for someone to worship God as they want him to be rather than as he is?

3. Has there ever been a time when you discovered something about God, through reading the Word, that you had been previously unaware of or had a mistaken idea about? Explain—

Sometimes, the biggest hindrance to our spending time in the Bible is that we do not have a Bible translation we can readily understand. For years the only Bible I had was the King James, and while I loved the poetry of its language, I frankly had trouble understanding it. Finding a modern language paraphrase made a tremendous difference. The first Bible I used for daily devotional reading was not recommended for scholarly study, but it spoke to my heart in a simple, beautiful way—and God helped it come alive.

Unit Three, Day Four

IS YOUR FAITH RESTING ON SOMEONE ELSE’S BELIEF?

Don’t you know what the Scripture says...? [Rom. 11:2b]

Very likely your faith is resting on someone else’s belief—as mine was—unless you have a personal Bible and know your way around in it. Consistent, planned Bible reading is a requirement for any Christian if we want to understand what we believe.

I was middle-aged before I began to read my Bible. I went to church, but only learned what someone else told me about God. I found myself quoting people who gave sermons rather than quoting scripture. I didn’t know the books of the Bible, let alone the promises. My faith rested on someone else’s belief.

The trouble with that approach is that I never knew for sure why I believed what I did. How many of us go to church for years trusting someone else to tell us what to believe?

Reading God’s Word has helped me to know first-hand about God’s love for me, his faithfulness, his promises, what he wants and expects of me. It has given me assurance that when I pray, I can know he is listening. I didn’t have that before, and the sad thing is, I didn’t know it was missing.

Reading the Bible every day is essential, and so is our prayer as we pick it up, before we begin to read. We must ask the Lord to help us understand all he wants us to know, and to enable us to live, in his strength, in a way that is responsive and obedient to what we read.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Think about where you are in your knowledge of the Bible today versus five years ago, versus last year. How do you feel about the progress you have made?

2. Why might it be important for a person who participates in Bible studies also to follow a plan to read devotionally through the Bible every year or so?

3. What is the difference between having someone tell you about God and reading the truth about God for yourself?

God can speak to us from any page in the Bible. Sometimes when we are seeking a word from God we are tempted to turn to favorite passages. There is nothing wrong with that, but how much more meaningful it is when we turn to a chapter simply because it is in our daily reading plan, and find God’s Spirit waiting there with just what we need for that particular day. Do you think it important to breathe a prayer as we open the Bible? What kind of prayer might it be?

Unit Three, Day Five

SHOULD WE HAVE A PLAN FOR DAILY BIBLE READING?

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. [Psalm 119:11]

Reading the Bible is an important part of our daily quiet time, and it is best if we follow a simple plan that takes us through the entire Bible at our own pace, so that we leave nothing out. Trouble is, many of us begin with Genesis—and get quickly bogged down and quit. At least that was my experience, until I found Tim LaHaye’s book, *How to Study the Bible for Yourself*. LaHaye suggests a plan that keeps you in the New Testament for a year, and then takes another two years to complete the entire Bible. You read many books more than once.

LaHaye’s plan is to read First John every day for seven days, then the Gospel of John twice, and Mark twice. Then read Paul’s nine short epistles, Galatians through Philemon; then Luke, Acts and Romans. Finally, read through the New Testament, beginning to end, twice. There is an additional plan for years two and three.

LaHaye recommends spending 15 minutes a day, reading two to four chapters. Some days I read only one chapter, sometimes God seems to arrest me with one verse that I cannot get beyond. It does not matter how quickly or slowly we move through the Word, only that we do it consistently. Knowing the Word is critical to our prayer lives, because the entire Bible is God’s revelation of who he is, and how he wants us to relate to him.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Have you found it difficult to read the entire Bible? Why has that been (or not been) possible?

2. If you have successfully followed a plan that took you through the entire Word of God, what plan was it? Why did it work for you? Please be prepared to describe it.

3. In what ways do you think the effectiveness of our prayer lives might depend upon our understanding of—and obedience to—God’s Word?

There is no one plan for reading the Bible that is better than another; what is important is finding a plan that makes sense for you—and following it faithfully. As with everything in our spiritual walk, we need to seek God’s guidance and his enabling power. We ask him to lead us to the best plan for us, to give us the discipline to follow it and to show us how to find the time it takes—and we can know those are prayers he is eager to answer.



Unit 4

YIELDING TO GOD'S DIRECTION

*Letting Go of Self Allows the Relationship
to Grow.*

SCRIPTURE

“...your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” [Matt. 6:10]

YOUR KINGDOM COME.

In giving his disciples a daily pattern for their prayers, Jesus began, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” [Matt. 6:9] In Unit 3, we considered this verse as a beginning point for our worship. Jesus continues to point us toward daily worship in the verse we reflect on in this week’s unit:

“...your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” [Matt. 6:10]

Jesus tells us to pray and ask for the kingdom of God to come. In considering what that means, we know that Jesus promised he will come again [Matt. 24:30], and that he will establish his kingdom on earth [Rev. 20:4]. We can certainly join the Apostle John in his final prayer, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” [Rev. 22:20] But there is another verse which presents truth about the kingdom of God as it relates to us personally.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN US.

“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, “Here it is,” or “There it is,” because the kingdom of God is within you.”” [Luke 17:20-21]

If we are children of God, who can call him “our Father,” we have the kingdom of God within us. Jesus sent his Spirit to live in us, and promised that as he is in the Father, we will be in him and he will be in us [John 14:16-20]. Christ taught that he is the true Vine and we are to abide in him [John 15:1-8], as branches that abide in and draw life from a vine.

Jesus’ life in us puts the kingdom of God within us. For his kingdom to come in us, day after day, we must be filled with the Spirit [Eph. 5:18]. Paul tells us, “...the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.” [1 Cor. 4:20] We are to have Christ’s power resident within us, his life released through us to bear his fruit [John 15:8,16]. This happens only to the degree that we are surrendered to him, emptied of self, so that his Spirit can fill us as completely as he desires, that his kingdom can come in and through us fully and freely. As part of our daily prayer, we must surrender all that we are to him: “May your kingdom come in and through my life today. I surrender all that I am, that you may live in me and through me, that my life may bear your fruit.”

YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

We are to submit our will to the Father's will. We might ask ourselves, how is God's will done in heaven? The answer is: Immediately and without question. How does he want us to obey him here on earth? As completely and obediently as the angels carry out his will. Is that true of our lives? When we pray does our heart cry out, "Your will, not my will"?

Jesus himself is our best example of submitting to the Father's will no matter what the consequences. Three times in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed for the Father's will to be done. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus had exhibited the surrendered life. He lived in reverent submission [*Heb. 5:7b*], and he acknowledged that he had come to do nothing on his own but to speak what the Father had taught him. Jesus always did what pleased the Father [*John 8:28b-29*], and saw the Father's will as his priority [*John 4:34*]. During this time of personal agony in the garden, as Jesus wrestled in prayer he presented his need, as he encourages us to do—yet he surrendered absolutely to the will of the Father [*Matt.26:39,42,44*]

Jesus taught that we, too, are to surrender ourselves. We must submit everything we are and all that we have to God's will:

"Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" [*Luke 9:23*]

In taking up our cross, we're to die to self. Jesus says every day we must choose to take up our cross, to give up self.

"When Jesus heard this, he said to [the rich young ruler who said he had kept all the commandments], 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'" [*Luke 18:22*]

Obedying the commandments was not enough; Jesus said the rich man must surrender everything to him. It was not the man's wealth Jesus wanted, it was his heart, his will. Jesus knew the man loved his wealth more than the Master. We, like the ruler, must be willing to surrender anything that we deem more important than God, to give up self, give up our will. The kingdom cannot come to fullness within us, nor can we live the Spirit-filled life, if we are holding on to self-will.

TO SURRENDER AND SUBMIT, WE MUST FIRST TRUST GOD.

To surrender our lives completely to God, obeying him immediately and without question, requires a degree of trust. Such trust can only come as we know him—not know about him, although that knowledge reveals who he is, but know him through our daily experience with him. Only then can we learn first-hand of his faithfulness, his love, his provision, his willingness to hear and answer prayer.

Our experience with God leads us to trust him, and that trust leads to the desire to obey and surrender. Such experience grows out of our personal relationship with God, which is cultivated in the quiet time. It's a relationship that becomes real as we grow increasingly aware of his presence within us.

WHAT IS AT RISK IF WE DO NOT SURRENDER?

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” [Rom. 12:1-2]

Surrendering ourselves as living sacrifices is meant to be part of our daily worship. It is as we surrender ourselves that the Holy Spirit is able to fill us—and transform us through the renewing of our minds. We grow increasingly sensitive to his still, small voice as he guides and directs us according to God’s perfect will.

If we are not fully surrendered, the Holy Spirit doesn’t have full access to us. The result is that we may not be able to discern the difference between God’s good and pleasing will—and his perfect will. We might settle for the good in lieu of God’s best, his perfect will for our lives.

Every time we pray, “your kingdom come—in me; your will be done—in me; here on earth, as it is in heaven—*immediately and without question*,” we are denying self and pledging obedience. With that prayer, we are surrendering ourselves as living sacrifices, and we are making ourselves available to God, so that he can work his perfect will in and through us.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflecting on the video, did anything seem pertinent for your prayer life? In what way?
2. Why might it be important to pray a prayer of surrender each morning? (page 24, question #1)
3. What connection do you see between surrendering our lives to God and abiding in the Vine? Can we abide in Christ without surrendering our lives to him? (page 25, question #1)
4. How do we abide in the Vine? In Jesus’ analogy, he said he is the Vine and we are branches. We know he doesn’t expect us to live in the world without doing anything. So what did he mean? How can we abide in him in the busyness of day-to-day living? (page 25, question #2)
5. In what way might it be better to spend a few minutes every day with God than to spend a longer time once every few days? (page 26, question #1)
6. What is your experience with praying “popcorn” prayers? These are silent prayers offered throughout the day to offer a quick word of praise or thanksgiving, to ask for guidance or strength, or to breathe a quick prayer for someone else. (page 27, question #1)
7. In what ways was the prayer on page 28 helpful? Did you actually pray it? Or, did you use it as a pattern for a more personal prayer of surrender? (page 28, devotional message)
8. If you have been praying your own prayer of surrender, before or during this course, how has it affected your prayer life? If you haven’t, do you think it will? In what way? (page 28, question #1)
9. Take a moment to reflect on your week’s study and the points covered in your group discussion this week. What is the one thing you think God most wants you to remember?

Unit Four, Day One
IS WORSHIP MORE THAN PRAYER?

...he was heard because of his reverent submission. [Heb. 5:7b]

Worship is prayer and more, much more. Jesus taught his disciples to pray with a model prayer which began with worship: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” [Matt. 6:9-10]

Hallowing God’s name in prayer is worshipping him with reverence and honor for who he is. But when we pray “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” our worship includes the submission of our will to his.

In Romans 12 Paul urges us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God as our spiritual act of worship [Rom. 12:1]. Offering ourselves as living sacrifices is dying to self. It is yielding to his will—not an option, if we are to be his disciples. That is why, if we have only ten minutes to pray every morning, our prayer should be one of worship and submission.

God wants us to be his children, in a relationship that can never be severed. He wants us to be his sheep, hearing his voice and following him; his disciples, denying self. He wants us to be branches, connected to the Vine, living in the power of his Spirit.

Our worshipful prayer of submission says yes to all of that, “Yes, Lord, whatever you ask.” And more than anything else we can say or do that is our spiritual act of worship.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Why might it be important to pray a prayer of surrender as part of our prayer time each morning?

2. In what ways might such a prayer be identified with Paul’s admonition of Romans 12:1-2: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”?

3. In what way might such a prayer be honoring to our Father? In what way might it be important to us?

Our daily prayer of surrender is our spiritual act of worship that prepares us for “praying without ceasing” [1 Thes. 5:17] throughout the day. It establishes our connection with God, and when it includes confession of sins, assures that we can be in fellowship with him.

Unit Four, Day Two
SURRENDER TO THE VINE

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.... [John 15:5]

In his last hours with his disciples, Jesus described himself as the vine, his disciples as the branches—and in the same passage, said “apart from me you can do nothing.” [John 15:5b] It is not the life most of us expect, is it? After all, we have been raised to be independent and self-sufficient. We anticipate marching orders that tell us to do something for God.

Instead, in this illustration Jesus says we can do nothing on our own. Branches are meant to be attached to the vine, and it is the vine that brings life. From that life fruit is borne.

But do you remember that Jesus said something similar about himself? In John 5:19-20 Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.” In verse 30 he repeats it: “By myself I can do nothing.”

Jesus absolutely surrendered himself to his Father’s will. That is what he is asking us to do with him, to live the branch life that is fully available, wholly surrendered, that he might live in and through us today. We surrender in prayer.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. What connection do you see between surrendering our lives to God and abiding in the Vine? Can we abide in Christ without surrendering our lives to him?

2. How do we abide in the Vine? In Jesus’ analogy, he said he is the Vine and we are branches. We know he doesn’t expect us to live in the world without doing anything. So what did he mean? How can we abide in the Vine throughout the busyness of day-to-day living?

3. Do we have to make a conscious effort to abide in the Vine, or does it simply happen when we become Christians and receive the indwelling Holy Spirit? Explain—

As branches, we are, in effect, grafted into the true Vine when we are born again. We must be willing to be attached. When a branch is grafted into a real vine, two things happen. First its wood adheres to the wood of the vine; it begins to abide in the vine. Second, the sap from the vine begins to flow into the new branch, where it produces leaves and fruit and new growth. So it is with us. Such life is evidence of our rebirth, of our being grafted into the true Vine.

Unit Four, Day Three
PRIORITY OF SURRENDER

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices.... [Rom. 12:1]

Jesus taught us to go into our room, close the door and pray to our Father [Matt. 6:6]. How long should we spend in such a time of prayer? Long enough to build a personal, continuing relationship with the living Lord, and that varies from person to person.

The Lord knows we have got to start somewhere, and though he wants our best time of day and our undivided attention, he does not set any guidelines as to how long that should be. The important thing is to begin. A good goal is 30 minutes, but that is not realistic for some people. If ten minutes is all we have, we should schedule it faithfully every day, without fail—and God will honor it. That is not long, but it is long enough to set the stage for an on-going relationship with God. It’s how we spend those minutes that is most important. It must begin, as Jesus taught [Matt. 6:10] with a prayer of surrender.

First, we quiet ourselves. We acknowledge God’s presence and ask him to help us pray. We acknowledge that he is our Lord, tell him how much we love him, confess any sins he brings to mind, and ask him to help us be all that he wants us to be through the day. We give him our lives. If that takes all ten minutes, it doesn’t matter. We can bring him our prayer needs as we move through the day, knowing that we have settled the most important issue in our Christian walk—that we are his children, and he is not only our Father, but our Lord.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. In what way might it be better to spend a few minutes every day with God than to spend a longer time once every few days?

2. If you have had the experience of a daily quiet time over a period of time, in what way has the length or quality of time you spend with him changed? If you haven’t had that experience, what do you think might happen?

3. In what ways has God honored small steps of obedience in your life?

Our daily prayer of surrender includes:
Worship—telling the Lord why we love him.
Confession—naming our sins and asking forgiveness.
Yielding ourselves—acknowledging that all that we are belongs to him, asking him to have his way in our lives that day.

Unit Four, Day Four
PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. [Luke 18:1]

How can we extend our quiet time throughout the day? Some of us do not have a quiet time because we cannot imagine finding more than ten minutes—and it doesn't seem like enough time. Truly, it isn't. It isn't enough time to pray for our loved ones, or to bring our own needs to God. It is not enough for serious Bible reading. It is barely time to come into his presence and pray a prayer of surrender. But if we take it as a beginning point for prayer, it changes our perspective. It's like plugging in a phone—we can dial his number any time and the call will go through.

When we are confident the line is open, we can send up short prayers anywhere, any time—you might call them “popcorn” prayers. They just pop up throughout the day—prayers of praise and thanksgiving, prayers calling on God for his help for us and for others. We can enter into praise and worship as we listen to Christian music, agreeing with what is being said in song—“Yes, Lord, that is how I feel; I love you.”

We can pray any time we are doing something routine—driving the car, walking the dog. But those first ten minutes are so important! We show respect through our undivided time and attention. How can God know we put him first, if we never do?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. What is your experience with praying “popcorn” prayers? These are silent prayers offered throughout the day to offer a quick word of praise or thanksgiving, to ask for guidance or strength, or to breathe a prayer for someone else.

2. When you pray popcorn prayers, does it make a difference to you whether or not you have had a quiet time with him that morning? Why or why not?

3. When you pray such prayers, do you think it makes a difference to God whether or not you have had a quiet time with him that morning? In what way? If you generally do not pray such prayers, what seems to hold you back?

*“Man was created for fellowship with God. God made him in His own image and likeness so he would be capable of understanding and enjoying God, entering into His will, and delighting in His glory.... This fellowship with God is meant to be ours all day long, whatever our condition or the circumstances surrounding it. The ability to maintain close and glad fellowship with God all day long will depend entirely upon the intensity with which we seek Him in the hour of secret prayer.” [Andrew Murray, *The Inner Life*, pp.12-13, Whitaker House, Springdale, PA 1984.]*

Unit Four, Day Five

OUR PRAYER OF SURRENDER

...Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. [Luke 23:46b]

Father, I acknowledge that where our prayer life and our personal love relationship with you are concerned, none of us ever arrives. We are always “under construction” as your Holy Spirit makes and molds us into the image of your Son.

I know it is important to spend time with you every day, that it is the only way I can make myself available to you, to learn who you are, and all that you desire me to be. But sometimes simply finding the time every day to come into your presence is difficult. I seem unable in my own strength to find the discipline to take those first basic steps.

So I ask you to help me. Enforce every right choice I make with your enabling power. Teach me to pray, beginning with a prayer of surrender, presenting myself to you as a living sacrifice. Help me not to conform to this world, but to be transformed and renewed in my mind. Help me to learn more about denying self, letting go of self-confidence, self-reliance, self-importance so that I can totally depend on you.

Help me to understand your Word. Teach me how to apply it to my life today. Enable me, in your wisdom and strength, to make choices that are obedient and pleasing to you. Grant me, wherever I am on the path to spiritual maturity and the fullness of a personal love relationship with you, to draw closer to you than I have ever been before, in Jesus’ name, amen.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. If you have been praying such a prayer, before or during this course, how has it affected your prayer life? If you haven’t, do you think it will? In what way?

2. If you have been asking God to help you experience deeper levels of prayer during this course, in what ways has he responded?

3. What is the main thing God seems to be doing in your prayer life right now?

*“Spiritual growth is impossible apart from the practice of prayer. Just as the key to enhanced relationships with other people is time spent in communication, so the key to a growing relationship with the personal God of heaven and earth is time invested in speaking to him in prayer and listening to his voice in Scripture.” [Kenneth Boa, *Handbook to Prayer: Praying Scripture Back to God*, p.1, Trinity House Publishers Inc., Atlanta, Georgia, 1993.]*



Unit 5

ASKING FOR GOD'S PROVISION

His Nature Is to Give—but First We Must Ask.

SCRIPTURE

“Give us today our daily bread.” [Matt. 6:11]

THE ORDER OF PRAYER

In Matthew 6, Jesus provides a pattern for our daily prayers. It is important to consider the order in which he emphasized different points of prayer: first we are to worship, hallowing God's name. As part of our worship, we surrender our lives that his kingdom may come and his will be done in and through us. Then, Jesus tells us, we are to ask for what we need:

“Give us today our daily bread.” [Matt. 6:11]

Our Lord began his model prayer by telling us to pray to “our Father.” We can and should come to our heavenly Father with the innocent expectation of a child who asks his father for what he needs and is confident he can trust his father to give it. At this point in Jesus' ministry and teaching on prayer, when he is teaching the basics of prayer, he does not encourage us to ask for whatever we *want*. Jesus says we're to ask for what we *need*. We are to ask for daily *bread*, the essentials of life. Like Paul, we must learn to be content with what God determines we need [Phil. 4:12]. Our Father may give us more than what we ask, he may give abundantly beyond what we ask—or he may not.

We don't have to do all of our asking in our morning quiet time; in fact, the Bible teaches we are to “pray without ceasing” as we move through the day [1 Thes. 5:17, NKJV]. We are free to ask, and we should be asking, that our needs and the needs of others be met hour by hour. When we “go into our room and shut the door” as Jesus taught [Matt. 6:6], it is there, in those few quiet moments, that we establish communion with God. As we reverently offer our prayer of worship and surrender, we establish a beginning point for praying without ceasing.

Such a sacrifice of our time and energy is honoring to God. It's our way of demonstrating his importance and priority in our lives: we put him first, as best we can, before the busyness of the day overtakes us. Once we have done that, we can more effectively pray on the run, sending up prayers of petition (for ourselves) and intercession (for others) whenever we encounter a need, assured that that we have already connected with God in a powerful way.

Praying for “daily bread” indicates that we're to pray about even the most ordinary things. Nothing is too small or unimportant to take to God. Yet asking for physical or material needs is given its proper perspective: that is not all we are to pray for. When we do ask, our requests come as only one part of a prayer life that includes daily worship and surrender—and as we see from the rest of the model prayer, confessing sins, forgiving others and seeking deliverance from temptation and the evil one. God wants us to ask, he welcomes our asking—but he expects our prayer lives to be much more.

ASK DAILY.

In this basic teaching on prayer, these first steps for prayer, we learn we are to ask for *daily* bread. Jesus is teaching us we are to focus on the needs of each day, not the worries about tomorrow. He later tells us we are not to “worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” [Matt. 6:34b]

And it’s clear that Jesus teaches us to ask every day, not once for all the bread we will ever need. Asking daily ensures that we acknowledge our total dependence upon our God for the most fundamental and basic needs of our lives. We are as dependent upon his provision as the Israelites were in the desert when they gathered his manna every morning. We are to come expressing that same total dependence upon God.

OUR FATHER KNOWS WHAT WE NEED.

“...your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” [Matt. 6:8]

Notice that this verse, Matthew 6:8, immediately precedes Jesus’ model prayer of Matthew 6:9-13. Just before Jesus taught his followers to ask for their daily bread, he said our Father already knows what we need, even before we ask. Why, then, would he teach us to ask?

For one thing, having our Father know our need is not the same as having him provide for that need. Jesus is teaching us an important kingdom rule: although God is almighty and sovereign and can give anyone anything at any time, he chooses to wait on our prayers—if not always, certainly most of the time. God wants us to live with an attitude of dependence, asking in faith for what we need, expecting him to answer as a loving father would. In asking and receiving daily, our faith grows through the experience of answered prayer. Our faith and trust are being built for the deeper levels of prayer, which Jesus taught later in his ministry.

THE MODEL PRAYER IS THE FOUNDATION FOR PRAYER.

Jesus is giving his disciples the fundamentals of prayer, the basic foundation that each of us needs for an effective prayer life. From these beginning steps, we must grow in our experience of prayer, learning how and what and when to ask, experiencing God’s readiness and willingness to answer. Those who are new and inexperienced in their prayer lives must be equipped with sufficient understanding of God’s will and character to pray on a more advanced level with persistence and boldness. Their faith must grow strong enough to move mountains. They must learn to abide in Christ and to allow him to abide in them, and how to pray according to his will.

Those new to prayer and the personal relationship with God are not yet able to fully understand the significance of the incredible prayer promises, which we will study in Unit 8. Jesus didn’t share those promises with the masses, but only with his twelve disciples. He didn’t share them until their last few days and hours together—promises in which he said they could have “whatever they asked.” These prayer promises are ultimately available to each of his disciples today, but only as we reach a level of maturity in our relationship with him, only as we have an understanding that grows out of a daily commitment to live for Christ and his kingdom. Such commitment is born and strengthened through the daily experience of prayer.

Jesus intends for us to master these first, basic steps of prayer. He wants us to establish a solid, consistent foundation for our prayer lives that will prepare us for the greater prayer assignments and experiences that are waiting for all of us. The principles Jesus taught in the model prayer of Matthew 6 are the starting point for each us, the fundamentals of prayer that will enable us to experience the powerful prayer life that we seek.

These foundational principles are so essential that we must return to them again and again to make sure we haven't lost sight of them. If we sense that we are not as close to God as we once were, or if we realize our prayers are not being answered as they used to be, or if we desire a deeper level of prayer, we must return to these basic fundamentals of prayer. We never outgrow them, never mature beyond them. They are necessary for every stage of our spiritual growth and maturity in prayer. We must ask—am I giving God time every day? Worshiping him and surrendering my life? Asking for what I need with the faith and dependency of a child? It is with these fundamentals that we begin, continue and mature in our prayer lives.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Did anything in the video presentation strike you as especially meaningful for where you are in your prayer life or walk with God? What seemed especially pertinent for you?
2. How important do you think it is to God that we learn to ask him for our daily needs to be met—not occasionally, but consistently? *(page 32, question #2)*
3. Some general things that we ask for will be obvious when they are answered, such as salvation, or for one of our children to marry a godly person—but they may take years. In what way might we add more specific prayers to these general ones? *(page 33, question #3)*
4. If you were a parent whose child never bothered to speak to you except when he or she wanted something, would it make difference in your attitude about giving what he wanted? Explain your reasoning. *(page 34, question #1)*
5. Can you think of an occasion in the Bible when God answered “no”? Note one or more. *(page 35, questions #1-3)*
6. In what way do you think it might be important to consider the context of the passage of scripture in which a prayer promise appears? *(page 36, question #1)*
7. What is one of the most important things this week's study has led you to consider about your prayer life?

Unit Five, Day One

MUST WE ASK GOD FOR WHAT WE NEED?

Give us today our daily bread. [Matt. 6:11]

In Jesus’ model prayer, his first public teaching on prayer, he taught us clearly that we should ask our heavenly Father for what we need—for our daily bread [Luke 11:3, Matt. 6:11]. He went on to tell his disciples many other times that they should ask.

This prayer principle was so ingrained in James, that when he wrote his epistle, he said, “You do not have, because you do not ask...” [James 4:2b] I find that a startling statement, that I could have needs that are not being met, simply because I do not ask. Or worse, that those I love could go without because I fail to pray.

Why do you think God waits for us to ask? He knows what we need even better than we know ourselves. Jesus said, “...your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” [Matt. 6:8]

Why then, must we ask? For one thing, it clarifies our thinking. For another, it shows that we recognize who has the supply—for everything we need. The provision for our daily physical needs, as well as for wisdom, guidance, comfort, strength, courage, healing, joy, peace...God supplies it all. And when we ask, we are acknowledging our total dependence upon him. When we fail to ask, the implication is, we don’t need help, we can manage on our own. Not me.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Reflect back over your prayer life of the past few weeks. Has it been your habit to ask God for practical, physical, material needs to be met? Have you consistently asked for what you needed as you moved through the day? If yes, how long have you been praying this way, and why have you continued? If no, why do you think you haven’t?

2. How important do you think it is to God that we learn to ask him for our daily needs to be met—not occasionally, but consistently?

3. What are some of the reasons why you think it would be important to God for us to learn to pray this way consistently?

“Looking closely at the wording in the prayers of the Bible, one senses that the men and women of the Bible had heard God ask them, “Why should I grant this request?” Perhaps we should say they approached prayer seeking God’s viewpoint. They wanted to pray for what God wanted to do. Then they offered God a reason to grant their request.” [T. W. Hunt and Catherine Walker, *Disciple’s Prayer Life*, p.11, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, TN, 1994]

Unit Five, Day Two

HOW SPECIFIC SHOULD WE BE IN OUR PRAYERS?

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. [Mark 10:51]

Jesus taught us to be specific, asking for our “daily bread” [Luke 11:3, Matt. 6:9], for what we need day by day. When the blind man called out for mercy, Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” [Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-41] The man wasn’t healed until he said, “I want to see.”

Years ago *Reader’s Digest* had a wonderful example of specific prayer from a former prisoner of war. He had been captured, his hands were tied behind him, and enemy soldiers were walking him through the woods at night. He kept falling, and the soldiers were growing impatient.

He prayed, but he said it wasn’t for strength to endure, or the ability to forgive or anything spiritual. He said, “Lord, I need light. If I can’t see, I’ll keep falling, and they’ll kill me.” Within seconds, an enemy soldier turned on his flashlight and kept it on the rest of the way.

That prayer was specific, direct and brief—asking for “daily bread,” for exactly what the POW needed for the moment. Not all our needs are so dramatic, but we should present them just as clearly. Jesus taught us to be brief and not to “keep on babbling” in our prayers [Matt. 6:7].

Sometimes people feel they shouldn’t ask about everything, but how do we know what to leave out? How can we tell what’s important? We wouldn’t be taught to ask, if God didn’t want to hear. God will decide what’s important, and when and whether and how to answer.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Think back over your prayers of the last few days or weeks. List below some of the more specific things you asked for:

2. Now note some of the more general things you asked for:

3. Some general things that we ask for will be obvious when they are answered, such as salvation, or for one of our children to marry a godly person—but they may take years. In what way might we add more specific prayers to these general ones?

“Our prayers must not be a vague appeal...or an indefinite cry...but the distinct expression of definite need. Such definite prayer teaches us to know our own needs better. ...It demands time, and thought, and self-scrutiny to find out what really is our greatest need. ...It teaches us to judge whether our desires are according to God’s Word, and whether we really believe that we shall receive the things we ask. It helps us to wait for the special answer, and to mark it when it comes.”

[Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, p.56, Whitaker House, Springdale, PA, 1981]

Unit Five, Day Three

HOW MUCH MORE WILL OUR HEAVENLY FATHER GIVE?

Every good and perfect gift is from above.... [James 1:17]

When Jesus taught on prayer as part of his Sermon on the Mount, he taught us to pray to “Our Father.” This was an incredible revelation of the relationship God wants to have with each one of us; in Christ we are God’s children, no longer just his people. Later in the sermon, Jesus taught that “everyone who asks receives,” [Matt. 7:8] underscoring several times the fundamental truth that our heavenly Father will hear and answer our prayers.

Jesus didn’t stop there. He went on to ask, “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” [Matt 7:9-11]

Jesus wanted his followers to understand that God not only hears and answers, but he hears from the perspective of a perfectly loving Father. Who is it then, who receives answers to prayer that are even beyond what was asked? One who loves him with childlike surrender, who is totally dependent, fully obedient. One who not only calls him Father, but loves him as Father, relates to him as Father—not just when he wants an answer to prayer, but every day.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. If you were a parent whose child never bothered to speak to you except when he or she wanted something, how might it affect your attitude about giving what he wanted? Explain.

2. If you were a parent whose child clearly understood your rules and didn’t pay any attention to them, in what way would it affect your willingness to give him the things he asked for?

3. If you were a parent with an obedient, attentive, appreciative child who came and asked for something would you automatically give it to him? What might you consider first?

4. Is God likely to treat us differently from an earthly parent in these respects? Why or why not?

“The prayer of a child owes its influence entirely to the relation in which he stands to the parent.... The power of the promise, ‘Ask and it shall be given you,’ lies in the loving relationship between us as children and the Father in heaven. When we live and walk in that relationship, the prayer of faith and its answer will be the natural result.” [Andrew Murray, With Christ in the School of Prayer, p.46, Whitaker House, Springdale, PA, 1981]

Unit Five, Day Four

DOES EVERYONE WHO ASKS IN PRAYER RECEIVE?

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. [John 15:7 NKJV]

Jesus taught “everyone who asks receives.” [Matt. 7:8] This is a familiar passage from the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus is giving tremendous assurance that our Father not only hears, but he answers prayer. “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” [Matt. 7:7-8] Six times Jesus makes the point. It is more than encouragement; it is a foundational truth. But is it true of our prayer lives? Are we seeing answers to prayer? If not, there has to be a reason—because God’s intention is that everyone who asks will receive.

We understand that sometimes God answers no, and sometimes he leads us to persevere. Those in themselves are answers; God has responded. But not every prayer is answered “no” or “wait”—on balance, if we are living in a personal love relationship with God, we should be seeing frequent answers to prayer. If we are not, that should itself be a matter for prayer.

It could be we are not praying, or our prayers are not specific enough to recognize the answers. Or perhaps, we are asking amiss [James 4:3]—a wrong request, a wrong motive, or a prayer offered when our fellowship is broken. Sometimes, we simply do not recognize God’s answer; he may have given an acorn, when we prayed for an oak.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Can you think of an occasion in the Bible when God answered “no”? Note one or more.

Can you think of an occasion in your life when it was obvious to you that God was saying “no”—and later you saw it was for your own good? Describe it.

2. Can you think of an occasion in the Bible when God answered “wait”? Note one or more.

Can you think of a time when God told you to wait? Describe it, and give reason why.

3. Can you think of an occasion in the Bible when God answered “yes”—right away? Note it.

Can you think of a time when God answered “yes” to your prayer right away? Describe it.

*“Through constant fellowship and daily communion with God, we can know how God thinks, what He desires, and what He wills because we know Him. ...To know someone, you must spend time with that person...you will never know God until you learn to spend time in prayer with Him. There is no exception. Power with God, power to know the will of God, power in positive prayer that brings definite results, comes only through much time daily in prayer with God.” [John Bisagno, *The Power of Positive Praying*, p.40, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1965]*

Unit Five, Day Five

ARE THE PRAYER PROMISES CONDITIONAL?

...if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. [1 John 3:21-22]

God’s prayer promises must be considered in the context of the Bible passages in which they appear, which often indicate conditions. Jesus promised that when we “ask, seek and knock” in our prayers, our heavenly Father will hear and answer, giving much more than we ask [Matt. 7:7-8]. But this incredible promise is in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus tells us how we are expected to live [Matt. 5-7]. We are to be salt and light, filled with good deeds and praise for God; more righteous than the Pharisees, who tithed, prayed, fasted and knew scripture.

We are not only not to murder, but to give up our anger; to recognize that the lust of the eye is adultery of the heart. We are not to divorce or go back on our word or take vengeance. We are to love our enemies, give to the needy, pray daily, fast regularly, give up seeking treasure on earth, refuse to worry and seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. We are to forgive others *everything*, not to judge or be hypocritical, and to build our lives on his truth.

Then—out of a life of obedience—we come to our Father to “ask, seek and knock” in the assurance that we will receive all that we ask, and more. Impossible, you say. Nobody’s perfect. True. But it is not our strength, it is his strength—Christ in us, helping us live the life that opens the door for the Father to give “much more.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. In what way do you think it might be important to consider the context of the passage of scripture in which a prayer promise appears?

2. In what ways can we reach for Christ’s strength to live the life that he outlines in his Sermon on the Mount?

3. In His teaching on asking, seeking and knocking, why do you think Jesus included the concept of God as our Father who wants to give more than any earthly father?

*“God invites you to ask, and He expects to be asked. But He only invites asking within the framework of His own principles. If you are to ask you must ask within God’s will and according to the rules and procedure God Himself gives you. Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus’ injunctions to ask are not blank checks. They have a purpose—our participation in the Kingdom. The injunctions in Matthew 7:7 are in the context of the Sermon on the Mount with all it requires in life.” [T. W. Hunt and Catherine Walker, *Disciple’s Prayer Life*, p.139, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, TN]*



Unit 6

SEEKING GOD'S FORGIVENESS

*He's Always Ready to Hear the Prayer
Of the Sincere Heart.*

SCRIPTURE

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” [Matt. 6:12]

THE FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF PRAYER

In his model prayer [Matt. 6:9-13], Jesus gives a pattern of prayer that includes the bare essentials, the fundamental elements that are to comprise our daily prayer lives. Each part of his prayer is important and must be included, if we want to experience the fullness of a personal relationship with God. Nothing must be left out.

As we move through this prayer verse by verse, we come this week to—

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” [Matt. 6:12]

FORGIVE US.

There are two parts to this verse. First, Jesus tells us we must, as a part of our daily prayer time, ask our Father to forgive us of our *debts*. Note that the word is plural. Some translations say “trespasses.” Both *debts* and *trespasses* in this sense mean *sins*; we are to examine our hearts and confess our individual sins day by day.

Knowing he would die on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins [1 John 2:2], that we would be justified in him so that no one could ever separate us from his love [Romans 8:38-39], why would Jesus then tell us we must continually confess our sins?

To understand this, we must consider the character and nature of our God. What are the angels singing at the throne of the Lord Almighty in Isaiah 6:3? The same thing they are singing at the throne in Revelation 4:8b—“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.” God is a God of love, of grace, of mercy, but the angels are not singing “Love, love, love” or “Mercy, mercy, mercy.” God is, above all, holy, and our holy God cannot tolerate any sin in his presence.

While it is true that we have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, that we are sanctified, made holy, set apart, in Christ [1 Cor. 1:30], it is also true that the Holy Spirit is continuing the process of sanctification in our lives [Rom. 8:29; Titus 2:14; Phil. 1:6]. Though we are saved, though we are new creations in Christ [2 Cor. 5:17], we all continue to sin [1 John 1:8]. As we sin, Jesus tells us we must confess those sins. To confess means to agree with God that they are sins, that they are wrong. We must be genuinely sorry and willing to be changed.

As we do this, our salvation is not at stake, if we have received Christ as our Savior and Lord—it is our fellowship with God that can be disrupted. One of the great truths of scripture is that the Spirit of God has been given to live within us as a “deposit” [2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5; Eph. 1:14]—as God’s “earnest money” guaranteeing our position as his children through Christ. But the life of his Spirit in us is grieved and quenched when we live with unconfessed sin and disobedience in our lives. Perhaps Jesus had some of the following scriptures in mind as he gave his admonition to his disciples regarding confession of sins:

- “But your iniquities [unconfessed sins] have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” [Isa. 59:2]
- “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.” [Psalm 66:18]
- “If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable.” [Prov. 28:9]
- “Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?” [Ezek. 14:3]

We see from these passages of scripture that iniquities, unconfessed sins that indicate an attitude of general or deliberate disobedience to God’s will, may cause God to choose not to hear or answer our prayers. These are sins we are aware of, sins we choose to “cherish.” Turning a deaf ear implies a choice to disregard God’s commandments.

An idol is something worshiped, something considered more important than God. Money can be an idol, motivating our lives, interfering with our ability to spend time with God. Food can be an idol, consuming our thoughts, causing abuse to our bodies with ill health or obesity. We are worshiping another person if we let a human relationship dominate our lives. If any desire dominates one’s heart, interfering with the Spirit-filled life, it is a continuing sin, an idol.

In the New Testament, Peter has a similar caution about sin that can hinder our prayers, having to do with our relationships with others:

- “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect...so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” [1 Peter 3:7]

God takes broken relationships very seriously. Disrespect to our wives (or husbands), interferes with our prayers. In addition, Jesus tells us we cannot even bring an offering to the altar, if we have an unreconciled relationship with anyone:

- “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” [Matt. 5:23-24]

If God will not accept our offerings, will he accept our prayers?

AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS [those who ‘trespass’ or sin against us]

The second part of this verse is perhaps the most difficult to face. Jesus admonishes us to ask for God’s forgiveness based on the way we have forgiven others. This was so important to Jesus that immediately following his model prayer, he repeated it even more strongly:

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”
[Matt. 6:14-15]

Jesus says the sin of unforgiveness is especially serious, so much so that if we refuse to forgive others, God will not forgive us. He is not talking about our salvation, which has been accomplished, but about the daily cleansing from sins that he has just taught his disciples to seek, the cleansing we need to maintain unhindered fellowship with him.

Jesus emphasized the importance of forgiving others when Peter asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?” Jesus answered, ‘seventy times seven.’”
[Matt. 18:21-22] Jesus did not say, “depending on the nature of the sin,” or “if your brother apologizes.” He said we must endlessly forgive, no matter what. We do not have to feel like forgiving; we have to decide to do it. Forgiveness is an act of the will, not of our emotions; but speaking the words is not enough. God knows our hearts.

God is sovereign, and he may hear and answer any prayer at any time he chooses. But his Word declares several times, in several ways, that unconfessed sin causes him not to hear and answer our prayers; we must conclude that he would have to make an exception to his character and nature to answer our prayers if we harbor unconfessed sins. What if we choose not to confess them? If we refuse to give up unforgiveness? Do we dare think Jesus’ teaching on confession is an option? If so, what a chance we take, assuming our prayers are being heard. Just because we are talking, we are not guaranteed that God is choosing to listen.

WE NEED TO BE CLEANSED

Jesus, in John 13, demonstrated the importance of our being cleansed, when he began to wash His disciples’ feet. Peter would not let him wash his feet, until Jesus said—

“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”
“Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, ‘not just my feet but my hands and head as well!’
“Jesus answered, ‘A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean....’” *[John 13:8b-10]*

We, as believers, have had our bath—but we must be sure to wash our feet before we enter into the presence of God. There is a picture of this principle in Exodus. When Aaron and his sons were consecrated, set apart as priests, they were first washed with water *[Ex. 29:4]*, then anointed with oil *[Ex. 29:7]* and sprinkled with blood *[Ex. 29:21]*. They were consecrated once and for all, as we have been consecrated today as priests in the royal priesthood *[1 Peter 2:5,9]*—cleansed and sprinkled with the blood of Christ, anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit. Yet even though they had been consecrated, Aaron and his sons had to wash their hands and feet with water whenever they entered the Tent of Meeting to be with God *[Ex. 30:19-20]*.

Our God is a holy God, and he cannot tolerate sin in his presence. Psalm 24 asks, “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart....” *[Psalm 24:3-4]* It is our fellowship with the Lord that is at stake when we do not confess our individual sins to God daily, moment by moment.

GOD’S PROMISE TO FORGIVE

“If we confess our sins [plural, individual sins], he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” [1 John 1:9]

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us. Sin is the easiest thing in the world to take care of, and when we confess our sins, God has promised that he will:

Hide his face from our sins and blot out all our iniquity. [Psalm 51:9]

Tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. [Micah 7:18-19]

Put all our sins behind his back. [Isa. 38:17]

Remove our transgressions as far as the east is from the west. [Psalm 103:12]

Remember our sins no more. [Jer. 31:34b]

To have fellowship with God restored so that he will hear our prayers, we must confess our sins.

WHOSE PRAYERS ARE EFFECTIVE?

“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” [James 5:16b, NKJV]

“The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.” [Prov. 15:8]

“The Lord is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous.” [Prov. 15:29]

Doesn't this give new meaning and hope for our prayers when we consider the second part of God's wonderful promise of 1 John 1:9?

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and *purify us from all unrighteousness.*” [1 John 1:9, italics added]

We are righteous in Christ, but we must be purified through confession from the continuing unrighteousness caused by our sins. When we confess those sins, God continually purifies us from all unrighteousness. Think back to James 5:16b—“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Aren't effective prayers those prayers that are answered? When prayers “avail much,” doesn't that mean God answers abundantly?

“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” [Matt. 7:11]

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...” [Eph. 3:20]

God's nature is to want to answer our prayers abundantly. If this is not the daily experience of our lives, it is something we should make a matter of prayer. While it is true that some prayers are answered “no,” and some are answered “wait,” if we are praying daily and asking for what we and others need, we should be seeing some of our prayers being answered every day. Not every prayer we are praying will be answered “no” or “wait.” We will not always ask for the wrong things or with the wrong motives, if we are walking with God. If we are seeing no answers to our prayers, or very few answers, we must consider that something is not as it should be in our walk with God, because he clearly wants to answer our prayers.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Let's give some thought to the video presentation before we turn to the Food for Thought and Discussion questions. Has anything struck you as especially important? Will it have a direct effect on your personal prayer life? In what way?

2. Why do you think so many in the church take sin and the need for daily confession of sins so casually? (page 42, question #1)
3. Is the daily confession of individual sins a regular part of your daily prayer life, or has it ever been? Would you consider the need to confess sins a growing awareness in your life? (page 42, question #3)
4. Can you think of a time when you may have rationalized or made excuse for a sin, rather than agreeing with God that it was wrong and confessing it? If so, what made it easy to rationalize? If not, what stopped you? (page 43, question #1)
5. Paul wrote—“My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.” [1 Cor. 4:4] In light of this truth, in what way is it important that we allow God’s Spirit to convict us of our sins? Can you think of a time when your conscience led you astray regarding sin in your life? In what way? (page 44, question #3)
6. Read Psalm 38. What does it tell us about David’s response to the sins in his life? In what way do you think his attitude toward his sins might be part of why he remained a man after God’s own heart? (page 45, question #3)
7. What might be at stake in our willingness to confess our sins? Should that affect the way we approach prayer? Has it had an impact on your prayer life? (page 46, question #3)
8. Considering this week’s lesson and daily assignments, the video presentation and your group discussion—what is the most important thing you think God wants you to apply to your personal prayer life?

I want to use these words: “My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have,” [1 Kings 20:1-4] as the words of absolute surrender with which every child of God ought to yield himself to his Father. ...the condition of God’s blessing is absolute surrender of all into His hands. If our hearts are willing for that, there is no end to what God will do for us, and to the blessing God will bestow.

...God does not ask you to give the perfect surrender in your strength, or by the power of your will; God is willing to work it in you. Do we not read: “It is God that works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” [Phil. 2:13]? And that is what we should seek—to go on our faces before God, until our hearts learn to believe that the everlasting God Himself will come in to turn out what is wrong. He will conquer what is evil, and work what is well-pleasing in His blessed sight. God Himself will work it in you.

Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender*, pp.7-11,
Whitaker House, Springdale, PA 1981

Unit Six, Day One

IS GOD HEARING OUR PRAYERS?

The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. [2 Chron. 15:2b]

There is nothing more important to the Christian walk than our having a deep, abiding, personal relationship with God. Yet it is a choice we make. God promises *if* we will draw near to him, he will draw near to us [James 4:8]. He tells us *time and again if* we will seek him, he will be found [Jer. 29:13]. But just as clearly, scripture tells us that if we have unconfessed sin in our lives, he will not hear our prayers.

In Psalm 66 we read, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” [Psalm 66:18] In Isaiah, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” [Isa. 59:2] Cherished sin is sin that we choose to hold on to; iniquities are unconfessed sins that indicate a disregard for obeying God’s will or commandments.

Do we realize that we might pray for days or weeks or years without God’s choosing to listen, if we never face the fact of sin in our lives? If we fail to recognize and confess those sins? We can ignore sin, but God cannot. His holiness will not allow it. Think of the prayers you have prayed in the last week. What concerns are on your heart? What have you asked God for? Strength? Guidance? Wisdom? Provision? Protection? Healing? *Forgiveness*? Without confession, God has said he will not hear us. If he chooses not to hear us, we are on our own. Perish the thought.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Why do you think so many in the church take sin and the need for daily confession of sins so casually?

2. Reflect upon your prayer life. How would you describe your overall attitude toward recognition and confession of individual sins?

3. Is the daily confession of individual sins a regular part of your daily prayer life, or has it ever been? In what way do you think the need to confess sins is a growing awareness in your life? Begin by sharing personally—

*“The daily confession of our sins to God is not a condition of our relationship with Him, but rather of our fellowship. ...we Christians are to confess our sins. This means individually to enumerate, name, repent of, and forsake our sins. It may be that you have not been in perfect fellowship with God, not had every sin forgiven, for many many months and years. Asking God daily to forgive our sins in general is not enough...if you will wait patiently before the Lord, He will certainly bring them to your memory and place the gentle finger of His convicting spirit upon them.” [John Bisagno, *The Power of Positive Praying*, p.56-57, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1965]*

Unit Six, Day Two

AGREEING WITH GOD—SIN IS WRONG.

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise. [Psalm 51:17]*

Confession is more than naming our sins before God. It is agreeing with God that sin is wrong, and we were wrong to have allowed it in our lives. Because God is holy, he cannot tolerate *any* sin in us. James tells us, “the person who keeps every law of God, but makes one little slip, is just as guilty as the person who has broken every law there is.” [James 2:10, TLB] That is a difficult truth for us to accept. After all, we are not so bad. We haven’t committed murder or done something really awful.

But what did Jesus teach us in the Sermon on the Mount? “You have heard... ‘do not murder...’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.” [Matt. 5:21-22] Anger is the root sin of murder, and if we dig deeper, we recognize that pride is the root cause of anger, and most every other sin. Pride is putting self first.

Self is the enemy. After all, Satan has been defeated. He can torment us. He can tempt us, but he was defeated at the cross. Self is at the center of most of our sins—self-centeredness, self-confidence, self-reliance, self-righteousness, selfishness. And if Satan is the master deceiver, self is certainly the master of rationalization. We compare ourselves to each other, rather than to our holy God. We look at the world, rather than at Jesus, as our standard. There is no other standard for our lives. So when we go into our prayer closet, as we look for sin, we are to hold up our lives to his. And in confession, we agree with God when we are wrong.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Can you think of a time when you may have rationalized or made excuse for a sin, rather than agreeing with God that it was wrong and confessing it? If so, what made it easy to rationalize? If not, what stopped you?

2. Why do you think the Apostle John felt he should write the following: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”? [1 John 1:8]

3. What do you find to be most comforting about: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”? [1 John 1:9] Why?

*“After the prayer for daily sustenance, Jesus told us to ask for forgiveness of our sins. ...The cross cancels the legal debt of our sin. But constant agreement with God about the nature of sin is the only way we can maintain fellowship with Him in His holiness.... The word for ‘confession’ means ‘to say the same thing’ and implies agreement with another. Confession... is aligning ourselves in attitude with Him.” [T. W. Hunt, *The Doctrine of Prayer*, p.60, Convention Press, Nashville, TN, 1987]*

Unit Six, Day Three
SEARCH ME, O GOD.

...he [the Holy Spirit] will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment... [John 16:8]

None of us likes to examine our conscience too closely, even though we know we must confess our sins if we are to keep our lines of communication with God open. We tend to be quick to confess the obvious sins that come to mind without much effort because we cannot get away from them.

But coming before God, as David did, to pray, “Search me, O God, and know my heart...test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me...” [Psalm 139:23-24] is another matter. Do we really want God’s Holy Spirit probing our innermost heart? It’s not easy, but if we are to pray effective prayers, knowing that God will hear and answer, we must ask him to reveal the truth of our sins, how we have grieved and quenched His Spirit.

That is because we are masters at glossing over our sins. We often do not recognize them, or we call them by another name. We readily blame someone else, or excuse them away. We get mad, and it is “righteous anger.” Or it is because we were born with a quick temper, and it is part of our personality. We can make excuses. We can call it something else, but it does not change the fact that sin is sin and separates us from our God until it is confessed. His Spirit will help us see the truth that we might choose to confess and be forgiven and cleansed, but we must give him a chance, in the quiet of our prayers. We must be willing to be shown.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. In what way do you find it easy or difficult to come before God to pray as David did, “Search me...see if there is any offensive way in me”?

2. How willing are you to allow God’s Spirit to show you the sins in your life? How does that work out practically in your prayer life?

3. Paul wrote—“My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.” [1 Cor. 4:4] In light of this truth, in what way is it important that we allow God’s Spirit to convict us of our sins? Can you think of a time when your conscience led you astray regarding sin in your life? In what way?

“Beware of the prayer for forgiveness becoming a formality. Only that which is sincerely confessed is really forgiven.” [Andrew Murray, With Christ in the School of Prayer, pp.34-35, Whitaker House, Springdale, PA, 1981]

Unit Six, Day Four

SENSITIVITY TO SIN IS A GIFT FROM GOD.

...I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. [Psalm 51:3]

We are told that confession of sins is an on-going requirement for God to hear our prayers [Psalm 66:18]. God never asks us to do something he will not enable us to do, so we can count on him to make us sensitive to our sins so that we may confess them. That sensitivity to sin is a gift from God, part of what he desires to give us when we ask for the Holy Spirit [Luke 11:13]. Without the convicting of the Spirit, it becomes easy for us to be comfortable with unconfessed sin, oblivious to the fact we are out of touch with God and perhaps missing the blessing of answered prayer.

Have you ever wondered how King David could have lived with the awful sins of adultery and murder without confessing them to the God he knew and loved? If David could separate himself so completely from God that he could live with those sins, how much more could we? But God loved David so much that he would not let their fellowship continue to be broken. God sent Nathan the prophet to convict David of his sin: “You are the man!” [2 Sam. 12:7]

God knew David’s heart. He knew David would not question, would not deny or make excuse. David simply acknowledged he *was* the man. He confessed and repented, was forgiven and restored—as we will be, so that our prayers might be heard.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. As you reflect back over your walk with God, can you tell if you have grown more sensitive to sin in your life? More aware of sin? More alert to different sins? In what way?

2. When you consider the terrible sins that King David committed and realize that he is still known as a man after God’s own heart [1 Sam. 13:14], how does that make you feel about your relationship with God?

3. Read Psalm 38. What does it tell us about David’s response to the sins in his life? In what way do you think his attitude toward his sins might be part of why he remained a man after God’s own heart?

*“It is interesting that the Lord moved immediately in His prayer from ‘give us’ to ‘forgive us.’ ...A case could be made that this is the most important phrase in the Lord’s Prayer. It is the only phrase that He repeats for emphasis. At the end of the prayer, in verses 14-15, Jesus revisits this discussion. He says, ‘For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.’ This business of forgiveness is so important, Jesus adds a two-verse commentary on it.” [David Jeremiah, *Prayer, the Great Adventure*, pp.138-139, Multnomah Publishers, Inc., Sisters, OR]*

Unit Six, Day Five
ARE OUR PRAYERS EFFECTIVE?

The sun stopped in the middle of the day and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. [Josh. 10:13b-14]

James writes that the “effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” [James 5:16b, NKJV] Isn’t *effective* prayer *answered* prayer? Prayer that makes a difference in our lives, and the lives of those for whom we pray? We know some prayers are answered “yes,” some are answered “wait,” and some “no.” So if we pray and do not see answers, it is easy to consider the sovereign will of God; he chose not to answer the way we hoped he would. Sometimes, that is true. But not always.

Do you know what is wrong with that approach to prayer? It lets us off the hook. Time and again, Jesus promises we can have “whatever we ask” when certain conditions are met—and we conveniently forget the conditions. We act as though unanswered prayer is always because it was not God’s will. Is that it? Or might we be part of the problem? Is there a pattern of unconfessed sin in our heart? If so, God will not hear our prayers.

One condition for effective prayers is that they come from a *righteous* man. We are righteous in Christ [2 Cor. 5:21], but we also need to be cleansed of sins through confession [1 John 1:9], and there is only one way to do that—by naming them, one by one, and asking God’s forgiveness. What a loss it would be to go through life with prayers unanswered because we didn’t take confession seriously.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Is James’ statement that “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” [James 5:16b, NKJV] an encouragement to you? In what way?

2. Why might someone consider this same truth from James and find it discouraging?

3. What might be at stake in our willingness to confess our sins? Should that affect the way we approach prayer? Has it had an impact on your prayer life?

When we discuss unanswered prayer as a possible indication something is amiss in our walk with God, we are not speaking of one or two prayer requests, but an almost total absence of response from God. At any given time, we should be praying many requests: some will be answered “yes,” some “no,” and some “wait.” But we should not experience extended periods of no answers at all—unless we aren’t asking, or we are asking amiss. We are not likely to ask for everything with wrong motives or to always ask for things that are outside God’s will. When no answers come, we should ask the Lord to show us what is wrong. If it is a pattern of unconfessed sin that he reveals, that is an easy thing to take care of. We agree and confess!



Unit 7

TRUSTING GOD'S PROTECTION

He Can Guide You through the Enemy's Minefield.

SCRIPTURE

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” [Matt. 6:13]

OUR PATTERN FOR PRAYER

In giving his disciples a model prayer, a pattern of prayer to follow daily, Jesus gave specific words that can be prayed, but which in a larger sense represent categories of things we are to pray for ourselves and others. The fact that he uses the plural “us” shows that this pattern of prayer is not only for personal petition, but for intercession or for corporate prayer as his disciples gather to pray together.

Jesus teaches that our daily prayers must, at the very least, include: worship, surrender, asking that daily needs be met, confession and forgiveness, and lastly, deliverance from temptation and from Satan himself:

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” [Matt. 6:13]

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION.

The first thought many of us might have about this verse is that God wouldn't lead us into temptation. It is certainly true that God never tempts us to sin:

“When tempted, no one should say ‘God is tempting me,’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” [James 1:13]

God will never tempt us to sin; that is against his character and his nature. But it is also true that the Holy Spirit is the one who led Jesus into the desert where he was tempted by—and victorious over—Satan:

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.” [Matt. 4:1]

The temptation of Jesus was—as the temptations we face are—a test. The word used here for “temptation” is *peiramos*; it can also be translated “trial” or “test.” We know that throughout our lives, we must face tests. Most of them demonstrate what we know, and some give us the opportunity to show whether we can apply or put what we know to practical use. For instance, consider the driver's test that enables us to get our driver's license. There are two parts to the test: one, a written test, to see if we know what the rules are; and two, a driving test to see whether we can apply those rules as we drive.

God tests us periodically for the same reason: to show whether or not we know the rules we are to live by as his children, and whether or not we have learned to live by those rules. We all know that testing is necessary in our Christian lives and cannot be totally avoided, but Jesus said we should ask that we not be tested on a daily basis, even though such tests may be for our good.

When Jesus was tested, he was tempted to sin by Satan. It was at the end of his 40 days of fasting in the desert, when he was hungry and likely physically weakened, not in prime shape. His resistance must have been down, yet he did not waver. In his humanity, Jesus experienced the trials and temptations we experience:

“...[Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ...For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” *[Heb. 2:14-18]*

Jesus knew how difficult it is for us to resist the temptations of Satan. In giving us his pattern for our daily prayers, he places the asking not to be led into temptation right after the confession of sins. This suggests that it is with our failures fresh on our minds we would call out to God—“Please, don’t let me be tempted today; please don’t put me to the test.” As we ask God not to lead us into temptation, we ask out of an attitude of awareness of those sins we have just confessed, an attitude of brokenness and acute awareness of our recent failures with sin.

When we pray lead me not into temptation, we are following Jesus’ admonition of Matthew 26, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” *[Matt. 26:41]* We are in essence calling out to God, watching in prayer, acknowledging that we know we are weak, we are dependent upon him, that we want to live a victorious life that chooses righteousness over sin, but we need his help.

LEAD US IN PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The verse, “lead us not into temptation,” brings a contrast to mind. On the one hand, we see God’s Spirit leading Jesus into the desert where he was tempted by—and defeated—Satan *[Matt. 4:1-11]*, and on the other, we have in Psalm 23, Jesus our Shepherd leading or guiding us in paths of righteousness *[Psalm 23:3]*.

Our daily prayer, then, can include both: not only “lead us not into temptation,” but also “lead us in paths of righteousness.” We ask to be sanctified, to be set apart and given spiritual strength and maturity to face trials and temptations victoriously, as Jesus did. We are asking that God make a way for us through temptations in his strength, temptations that would prove to be too much for us to resist alone.

When we pray, “lead us not into temptation, but guide us instead in paths of righteousness,” we are asking for God’s victory over sin in our lives. We are asking him to give us the desire in our hearts to make right choices when we are faced with temptations, so that we will choose the righteous path away from temptation and sin.

ARE WE WILLING TO CHANGE?

God's power to help us say no to sin is never in question—the difficulty comes as we consider whether or not we want his power to overcome the temptation. We must ask for his power, we must yield to what we know is a right choice, according to his will and desire and not our own. The truth is, sometimes we just do not want to give up the sin; yielding to temptation is, for the moment, more satisfying.

Praying daily that God will not put us to the test is a way of acknowledging that sometimes we are not morally strong enough even to desire to make the choice to turn away from sin. The fact that we are willing to ask this much is an indication that his Spirit is working in our heart, helping us to grow more sensitive to sin and our need for his strength to resist it. It is a positive indication that the desire of our heart is changing.

DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE.

When Jesus taught us to pray for deliverance, some Bible translations say from “evil.” But the word Jesus used for evil was not neuter, it was masculine. A more accurate translation is rendered “from the evil one.”

Jesus not only taught us that we should pray for deliverance from the evil one every day, but he himself prayed for his disciples and for us who believe in him through their message—

“My prayer is not that you take them out of this world but that you protect them from the evil one.” *[John 17:15]*

Jesus was there when Satan fell like lightning from heaven *[Luke 10:18]*, and he identified Satan as the prince of this world *[John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11]*. We live in Satan's kingdom until we are rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God's Son *[Col. 1:13]*—there is no middle ground, no neutral territory. Satan is here, roaming the world like a roaring lion *[1 Peter 5:8b]*. He is the father of lies *[John 8:44]*, the deceiver *[Rev. 20:7-8,10; 2 Cor. 11:13-15]*, the tempter *[Gen. 3:13; Matt. 4:1-11; 1 Thes. 3:5]*, our accuser *[Rev. 12:10-11]*, a thief *[Mark 4:14-15]*, a murderer *[John 8:44]* and destroyer *[Rev. 9:11—Abaddon and Apollyon mean “Destroyer”]*. Satan cannot be everywhere at once, but he commands a host of evil spirits *[Eph. 6:12]*.

Unlike many among us today, Jesus took Satan seriously. One of the devil's biggest deceptions is that he does not exist. Because many in the body of Christ do not consider him a threat, they are especially at risk of falling under his influence. Jesus teaches we must pray for deliverance from the evil one—*daily*. And as we do, Paul gives us an encouraging promise:

“But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.”
[2 Thes. 3:3]

OUR PROTECTION IS IN THE SHELTER OF THE MOST HIGH.

Psalm 91 makes a wonderful prayer for protection for ourselves and our loved ones. It is an acknowledgment of God's protection for those who choose to “dwell in the shelter of the Most High.” *[Psalm 91:1]*

In this psalm, our Most High God is pictured as One who is willing to cover us with his feathers, to allow us to seek refuge under his wings [Psalm 91:4]. Can you imagine yourself under his wings? They enfold you, and you are gathered in close to his heart. Our Most High God is willing to hold us so close we can almost hear his heartbeat.

Yet this psalm presents important conditions to be met if we are to come under the shelter of God's wings. We must be those who choose to dwell in him [Psalm 91:9], those who are described as God speaks in the last verses of the psalm:

“‘Because he loves me,’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.’” [Psalm 91:14-16, italics added]

So as we pray for protection and deliverance from the evil one, we should also pray that we and those we love will desire—and in his strength be enabled—to live the life that assures such protection. God shelters those who love him, who acknowledge his name, surrendering with obedience to the Most High, and who are people of prayer. God wants us to love him, wants us to choose to dwell in his shelter. It is the shelter of our personal relationship with him, the spiritual intimacy that comes from the abiding life.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Consider the video presentation you've just seen. Did anything you just heard seem to reinforce or underscore in any way an impression you have received as you have gone through your assignments this week? In what way?
2. Why do you think Jesus placed such emphasis on our praying for deliverance and protection from Satan? Why would he pray that for us? (page 51, question #2)
3. Where Satan is concerned today, in what ways are people in the kingdom of heaven sleeping? (page 52, question #1)
4. Why do you think Jesus told the parable about Satan sowing weeds among the wheat? (page 52, question #2)
5. In what way do you think our “sincere and pure devotion to Christ” might be an effective strategy against Satan's temptations? (page 53, question #1)
6. Why would Jesus caution us to “watch and pray” so that we do not fall into temptation? (page 54, question #1)
7. In what way do you think prayer will help us overcome temptation? (page 54, question #2)
8. Psalm 91:9 says, “If you make the Most High your dwelling...” Dwelling in the shelter of the Most High is a choice we make. What do you think that choice is? How do you think we might dwell in his shelter? (page 55, question #1)
9. Now that we've added our group discussion to what we've studied and seen on the video this week, what is the one most important thing God has impressed upon you?

Unit Seven, Day One

ARE WE PRAYING FOR SPIRITUAL COVERING?

“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.” [Psalm 91:14]

When we pray, do we ask for protection from the forces of darkness? Typically, that may not be part of the daily prayers of most people. Should it be? What did Jesus teach us about praying for spiritual covering and protection? What is our example from his prayer life?

Jesus’ initial teaching on prayer included his model prayer of Matthew 6, an example of what to include in our daily prayers. In verse 13, we are taught to pray “deliver us from the evil one.” [Matt. 6:13] Some translations say, “deliver us from evil,” but the word Jesus used is not a neuter word; it is masculine—“evil one” is more accurate, referring to Satan. Jesus teaches we should pray for deliverance, for protection, for spiritual covering for ourselves and others.

Jesus reinforced the need for prayer for God’s protection in his high priestly prayer in John 17. It was a prayer for his disciples who were with him then, and for us as future believers [John 17:20]. The first thing Jesus asked for us was in verse eleven, “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name.” [John 17:11] And again, in verse 15, he prayed, “...protect them from the evil one.” [John 17:15] If it was important to Jesus to pray for our protection, should it not be important to us?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. If you reflect back over your prayers of the last few weeks, how often have you prayed for deliverance or protection from Satan? Has that been a typical pattern for your prayer life over the years? Why or why not?

2. Why do you think Jesus placed such emphasis on our praying for deliverance and protection from Satan? Why would he pray that for us?

3. In retrospect, do you feel you have taken the need to pray for deliverance from Satan seriously enough? Why or why not?

*“Satan’s perpetual aim is to infiltrate your thoughts with his thoughts and to promote his lie in the face of God’s truth. He knows that if he can control your thoughts, he can control your behavior. But Satan is clever. He doesn’t rumble in like a bull in a china shop; he slithers in like a snake in the grass [2 Cor. 11:3]. He can introduce his thoughts, tempting you to act independently of God, as if they were your own thoughts or even God’s thoughts. Scripture clearly teaches that Satan can put thoughts in our minds even as he did with David [1 Chron. 21:1], Judas [John 13:2], and Ananias [Acts 5:3]. [Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, p.53, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1993]*

Unit Seven, Day Two
IS SATAN REAL?

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him.... [1 Pet. 5:8b-9]

Before we can take Jesus' admonition to pray for deliverance from the evil one seriously, we must understand that Satan is a real enemy, and spiritual warfare is going on all around us—whether we're aware of it or not. Jesus knew that Satan is a powerful adversary. He was there when Satan fell like lightning from heaven [Luke 10:18]. And Jesus made it clear that Satan has authority on earth as prince of this world [John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11].

Jesus confronted Satan personally during his forty days in the wilderness [Matt. 4:1-11]. Matthew tells us the Spirit led him into the desert to be tempted, and he describes these temptations and Satan's defeat. Jesus knew Satan would come after us as well, so he taught us to pray that our Father would deliver us from the evil one [Matt. 6:13], and he personally prayed for our protection [John 17:11,15].

Many times Jesus warned about Satan's interference in our lives. In one parable he taught, "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.... The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil." [Matt. 13:24-30, 38-39]

While everyone was sleeping, the enemy came and was never noticed. Just as he will come today.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Where Satan is concerned today, in what ways are people in the kingdom of heaven sleeping?

2. Why do you think Jesus told the parable about Satan sowing weeds among the wheat?

3. Why do you think some Christians may tend not to take Satan too seriously?

*"If Satan cannot stop you from becoming a Christian, he will focus on defeating you, slowing your spiritual growth, discouraging you, and trying to make you passive and inactive. If that tactic does not work, he will try to get you so busy in daily activities or even Christian activities that you have no time to pray down the power to make your activity successful." [Wesley L. Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, p.230, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990]*

Unit Seven, Day Three
PROTECTION FROM THE TEMPTER

*...through death he might render powerless
him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. [Heb. 2:14, NASB]*

Satan is the tempter [Matt. 4:3] who came after Eve in the garden [Gen. 3:13], who came after Jesus in the desert [Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:13] and who comes after us all the time.

Paul was concerned about the Christians in the church at Thessalonica: “For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless” [1 Thes. 3:5]. And to the Corinthians: “But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” [2 Cor. 11:3]

If we are praying for ourselves, or for others, to be able to resist temptation, God’s Word gives us specific things to ask. What does Paul say we need? Faith—and sincere, pure devotion to Christ. That, then, becomes our prayer for protection from temptation, that our Father will build our faith in Christ, our trust in him. That God will help us believe that Christ truly lives in us through his Holy Spirit, so that we know we can resist Satan’s temptations—not in our own strength, but in his. That he will help us live the abiding life. We ask our Father to cultivate in us sincere and pure devotion to Christ, to balance the busy Martha side of our lives with the adoring Mary, who sat at Jesus’ feet [Luke 10:38-42]. Our protection from the tempter is our faith in Christ.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. In what way do you think our “sincere and pure devotion to Christ” might be an effective strategy against Satan’s temptations?

2. Do you now think that there may have been times in your life when you were not giving yourself to sincere and pure devotion to Christ—and temptations became a problem? If so, briefly note one.

3. Can you think of a time when you were strong in your victories over temptations and can now see it was because you were living closer to Christ? Explain.

*“Memorization and meditation upon the Word of God is perhaps the single greatest step a believer can take in helping him overcome the world, the flesh and the devil.... [Mark Bubeck, *The Adversary*, pp.57,69, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1975] “The best way to keep the enemy out is to keep Christ in. The sheep need not be terrified by the wolf; they have but to stay close to the shepherd. It is not the praying sheep Satan fears, but the presence of the Shepherd.” [A.W. Tozer, *Born After Midnight*, p. 43, Christian Publications, Harrisburg, PA, 1959]*

Unit Seven, Day Four

VICTORY OVER THE TEMPTER

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. [Col. 2:15]

Satan’s temptations are real. After all, his role as tempter is his premiere role, his debut in scripture, as he tempted Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil [Gen. 3:1-13].

But God’s Word tells us that we do not have to lose this battle with the tempter. Paul assures us of this in First Corinthians 10, where he writes, “And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” [1 Cor. 10:13b]

Jesus shared the way out with Peter in the garden of Gethsemane, when he said, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” [Matt. 26:41]. Watchfulness and prayer defeat the tempter. When we pray for protection, we do more than remind God that his Word says he will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear; we ask that he show us the way out, as he promised to do. We ask him to open our spiritual eyes to see temptation for what it is, and to keep us alert, in him and in his Word, so that we may know what is right.

Most of all, we ask that he help us become people of prayer, and that we learn to pray the truth of scripture, such as, “Lord, I thank you that sin is not my master” [Rom. 6:14]. Jesus taught that our protection and our victory come through prayer.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Why would Jesus caution us to “watch and pray” so that we do not fall into temptation?

2. In what way do you think prayer will help us overcome temptation?

3. Has there ever been a time when you experienced victory over temptation because of “on the spot” prayer? Explain.

Bruce Wilkinson once shared such a victory. At the end of a long, tiring day he boarded a plane and was seated between two other men. Both of them pulled out Playboy magazines. Wilkinson said he prayed, “Lord, I’m too tired to resist this on my own. Will you please take care of this temptation for me?” Within seconds, both men closed their magazines and put them away. Do we believe the Lord will work just that quickly for us? The key is to ask—for “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” [1 John 4:4]

Unit Seven, Day Five
BECAUSE HE LOVES US

If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. [John 14:23]

When we read Psalm 91, it is very affirming. In the first 13 verses, the psalmist assures us that God is our protector—our shelter, our fortress, our refuge, our shield, our rampart. He hides us, he sends his angels to guard us, he helps us trample Satan beneath our feet.

The last part of the psalm, verses 14-16, is written as a personal word from God. These verses begin: “‘Because he loves me,’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him...’” [v.14] Psalm 91 makes a beautiful prayer for protection. When we pray, there is no more important verse to consider than this: to be assured of God’s shelter and protection from the evil one, we must love him.

What is the first and greatest commandment? “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” [Matt. 22:37; Deut. 6:5]. Everything else in our walk is secondary. It is our love for God, our obedience to this commandment, which opens the door for us to dwell in his shelter, to abide in his protection.

What then, should our prayer be? Do we ask God to shelter our children? To cover our loved ones with his wings? To enable us to trample the lion and the serpent? Or do we ask for hearts that are yielded, obedient, tender, willing and able to love him more than anyone or anything else?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Psalm 91:9 says, “If you make the Most High your dwelling....” Dwelling in the shelter of the Most High is a choice we make. What do you think that choice is? How do you think we might dwell in his shelter?

2. In Psalm 91:14 God says, “Because he loves me, I will rescue him.” How did Jesus tell us we show our love for him? (See John 14:15,21,23,24; 15:10) Whom, then, does God rescue?

3. In Psalm 91:15 God is saying, “He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.” Whom does God answer? Whom is God with in trouble? Whom does God deliver and honor?

*“Power in prayer, the abiding in Christ’s love, and the enjoyment of His friendship depends upon the keeping of the commandments. The power to claim and enjoy these blessings in faith day by day also requires obedience. The will of God delighted in and done, is the only way to the heart of the Father and His only way to our heart. Keep the commandments: this is the way to every blessing.” [Andrew Murray, *The Inner Life*, p.51, Whitaker House, Springdale, PA, 1984]*



Unit 8

EXPECTING GOD'S RESPONSE

Our Relationship Builds Confidence in Him, and Boldness in Our Prayers.

SCRIPTURE

“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” *[James 5:16b, NKJV]*

“Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” *[Heb. 4:16]*

ARE WE COMING UP HIGHER IN OUR PRAYER LIVES?

That is what Jesus expects of us, that we will come up higher with him in prayer. Learning to pray is a process, and in his teaching, he carefully laid out the stages we would go through.

Early in his ministry, as we noted in units 2-7, Jesus set out basic guidelines for a daily prayer life. In Matthew 6 and 7, we're to have a daily quiet time and to follow his model prayer as our pattern for prayer. We are to learn to know God as our heavenly Father, who wants to give more than any earthly father could or would. We're to ask, seek, knock and receive in the context of the lifestyle he taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

Then about a year later, Jesus taught a more advanced level of prayer, and that's where we will pick up our study in Unit 8. Here, he taught that we are to be persistent and bold in prayer—not giving up until we receive the answer. And we're to pray in faith, believing we have received what we've asked.

Finally, during his last week and then his final hours, and only to his twelve disciples, he taught the highest level of prayer—in his name, by his Spirit, from lives abiding in him and bearing lasting fruit, prayers to advance his kingdom and glorify the Father. Again and again he emphasized that his disciples could have whatever they asked in prayer, if they would live and pray as mature, committed, insightful followers.

THE PROGRESSION OF JESUS' TEACHING ON PRAYER

It is easy to see the progression of Jesus' teaching on prayer when we consider the chronology of his teaching, which is reviewed here from Unit 2. Jesus taught his disciples step-by-step, first laying a strong, basic foundation from which to build a consistent and effective prayer life. He moved them from basic principles of prayer to those that were more advanced and required more understanding, more effort, more energy, more commitment:

Early in Jesus' ministry, part of his Sermon on the Mount—

- The importance of the quiet time... *[Matt. 6:6]*
- The need to be focused in prayer... *[Matt. 6:7]*

- How to pray, a pattern for prayer...[Matt. 6:9-13]
- Caution on unforgiveness... [Matt. 6:14-15]
- Encouragement to ask, seek, knock...[Matt. 7:7-8]
- Affirmation of God's nature and desire to give...[Matt. 7:9-11]

Later by perhaps several months—

- Agreeing with others in prayer...[Matt. 18:19]

Beginning about a year later—

- Persistence in prayer... [Luke 11:5-8]
- Asking for the Holy Spirit...[Luke 11:13]
- Always praying and not giving up...[Luke 18:1]
- Being bold in our prayers...[Luke 18:2-5]
- Crying out to God day and night...[Luke 18:7]

The final week of his life with the disciples—

- Having true faith...[Matt. 21:18-22; Mark 11:22-24]

The final hours of his life with the disciples—

- Asking in Jesus' name, in his character...[John 14:13-14; 16:23-24,26]
- Praying for things that will advance his kingdom...[John 14:12-13]
- Offering prayers that will glorify the Father...[John 14:14; 15:8]
- Abiding in the Vine...[John 15:7]
- Having Jesus' words [teachings] abiding in us...[John 15:7]
- Living lives that bear lasting fruit...[John 15:16]
- Experiencing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit...[John 16:23-26]

AGREEING IN PRAYER

In Matthew 18 Jesus taught about the importance of our praying together, of coming to the Father in agreement in prayer. "...if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them..." [Matt. 18:19]

When we consider this promise in the context of the passage of scripture, we know that this is not the blank check it appears on the surface to be. Jesus says we must come together *in his name*, which means according to his nature, his character, all that he is. To receive whatever we ask, we must ask for those things that he would ask for, asking from his perspective, from his point of view. Jesus would ask for those things that are according to the Father's will.

PERSISTENCE AND BOLDNESS

In your daily devotionals this week, you will consider the parables of Luke 11, "The Friend at Midnight" and Luke 18, "The Persistent Widow." Both parables teach the same principle: we are to persist in prayer. Jesus said we "should always pray and not give up." [Luke 18:1]

These are parables about intercession, praying for others. In Luke 11:5-8, we are taught that we must go to our heavenly Father as many times as necessary, confident that we will receive what we unselfishly request for someone who has a genuine need that we can't fill. The persistent widow teaches us to have an even greater level of persistence and boldness in prayer. Rather than

going to a neighbor, the widow returns to a judge who has already ruled against her. How much boldness would that take?

Yet, that is the way Jesus says we are to approach God's throne in prayer: with boldness, with certainty that we will not only be heard, but that we will receive what we ask. We must keep in mind that parables were stories that Jesus told to make a single point. The point of these parables is not that God is reluctant to answer; Jesus has already taught us that God not only wants to give, but he wants to give more than we ask [Matt. 7:9-11]. The point of the parables is that we are not to give up, but to persevere in prayer.

Is that the pattern we find in scripture? Elijah had to pray seven times before God sent the rain he asked for [1 Kings 18:41-46]. Daniel prayed and fasted for three weeks before God's angel brought his answer [Dan. 10:2-13]. Paul asked three times for the thorn to be removed [2 Cor. 12:7-9]. God answered Elijah and Daniel *yes*; He told Paul, *no*. But all three men knew when to continue persisting in prayer, and when to stop. How did they know?

They knew because they were all men who lived in close fellowship and personal relationship with God. They knew his voice; they knew when he was speaking to their hearts. It is the same with us today. God's Spirit will give us a sensitivity to know when and for how long to persist. Persistence is no guarantee of the answer we desire, but when we persist and God answers no, we can be sure we were heard and that he knows what is best. Maintaining the relationship is vital if we are to be Spirit-led in prayer.

ASKING FOR THE SPIRIT

In Luke 11 there is a remarkable verse. Jesus has just given the parable of the friend at midnight, explaining that God wants to give his children good gifts. Then he says, "...how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" [Luke 11:13]

As children of God, we know that the Holy Spirit indwells us [Acts 2:38-39]. But we also know from the Apostle Paul that we are commanded to "be filled with the Spirit" and that we can grieve or quench the Spirit within us, or can fan the Spirit into flame [Eph. 5:18, 4:30; 1 Thes. 5:19; 2 Tim. 1:6]. The degree to which we experience the Spirit's life depends upon us—and that is surely something we should make a matter of prayer, that God will help us to live in such a way that we can know the fullness of the Spirit's life and power. Jesus says we must ask for it.

TRUE FAITH

"Jesus replied, I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt...you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." [Matt. 21:21-22]

Such faith requires more than head knowledge. It requires experience with God. It comes as we pray and see God answer time and again. The better we know him and his Word, the more we are able to ask according to his will and plan and purpose—and the more answers we see. The more answers we see, the more our faith builds, and the more our faith builds, the more often we pray—which leads to more answers, more faith. Faith builds progressively, growing deeper and more profoundly assured year by year.

THE PRAYER PROMISES

Eight times Jesus promised his disciples, the men he was trusting to build his church after he was gone, that they could have whatever they ask in prayer. These are incredibly open-ended promises, but they are for committed disciples, and they come with conditions attached. To receive whatever we ask, like his original disciples, we must meet the following conditions, making sure that when we pray we are—

- Asking in Jesus' name, in his character...[*John 14:13-14; 16:23-24,26*]
- Praying for things that will advance his kingdom...[*John 14:12-13*]
- Offering prayers that will glorify the Father...[*John 14:14; 15:8*]
- Abiding in the Vine...[*John 15:7*]
- Having Jesus' words [teachings] abiding in us...[*John 15:7*]
- Living lives that bear lasting fruit...[*John 15:16*]
- Experiencing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit... [John 16:23-26]

It is easy to see why Jesus did not give these promises as part of his beginning instruction in prayer in Matthew 6, isn't it? Those who are just beginning to walk with him could not understand, let alone meet, such conditions. But any of us, as we grow in the Lord and in our understanding of his Word, can live and pray in such a way as to receive whatever we ask according to his character, for those things that will advance his kingdom and glorify the Father.

The Apostle John underscores the importance of the life we are to live and the kind of prayers we are to pray, if we want to receive whatever we ask:

“...if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, *because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.*” [*1 John 3:21-22, italics added*]

“...if we ask anything *according to his will*, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” [*1 John 5:14-15, italics added*]

CAN WE LIVE AND PRAY IN SUCH A WAY?

Nowhere—in these conditions to receive whatever we ask in prayer—does it say we must live perfect lives. When we obey his commands and do what pleases him, our hearts do not condemn us. That includes confessing our sins daily so that we may be cleansed of all unrighteousness, as we studied in Unit 6. It isn't that we must be perfect, but that we must take sin and the need to confess seriously.

When we ask according to his will, we can have what we ask. How do we know his will? His general will for each of us is stated clearly in the teaching of the Bible. Can you imagine asking the Lord to help someone seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and having the Lord say, no, he won't do that? When we ask for something that is clearly his will in Scripture, we are praying according to his will.

But what about the daily, practical needs of life? Which job to take? What house to buy? Whom to marry? We receive our guidance through the active presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We become sensitive and discerning in our prayers when we are living in personal relationship with the Lord. The better we know the Lord and his Word, the more “on target” every prayer will be. He wants us to know and pray his will far more than we.

The bottom line is, if we are abiding in Christ—like an empty branch grafted into a living vine, depending on him for everything—we will meet every condition for the prayer promises.

There is no limit to what God will do in answer to our prayers, but he does not give us these great promises without regard to the lives we are living or the things we are asking for. If we are living careless, disobedient, sin-filled lives, if our prayer life is inconsistent and practically non-existent except when we are in need, God is not going to overlook those things any more than an earthly father would. If our requests are selfish or ill thought out, if they will not advance his kingdom or bring glory to his name, would it be in character for him to give what we ask?

On the other hand, when we are living as his loving, respectful, obedient children, doing our best to ask unselfishly for what will bring his best to those we pray for and bring glory to him, God will respond as we would to such a child: the sky is the limit. With him, that's literal. Why are we content to settle for less?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Did anything you have seen on the video seem to underscore something God was applying to your personal prayer life this week? What is it, and why do you think it's important?
2. Why do you think God wants us to learn to be persistent and bold in our praying? Why does he not simply give us what we ask, as long as we are asking for something that is his will? (*page 62, question #1*)
3. Why do you think Jesus waited until the last week of his ministry to share his most compelling prayer promises with his disciples? Why do you think he shared them only with the 12 disciples and not the large numbers of followers and disciples he had taught on other occasions? (*page 63, question #1*)
4. In what way do you think it might be easy for inexperienced pray-ers or relatively new Christians to misunderstand the appropriate use of such a prayer promise? What effect might it have on their prayer lives or their faith in God? (*page 63, question #3*)
5. In Biblical times a person's name represented his person, his nature, his character. We know that Jesus is the name above every name, and that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow [*Phil. 2:9-10*]. Just using his name invokes the authority his name represents, his sovereign authority. But his name also represents his person, just as your name represents you. We often hear that our reputation is only as good as our name—our character. So when we pray in the name of Jesus, we pray in his authority and according to his character.

Does that make a difference in what we pray? Should it? In what way(s)? (*page 64, question #1*)

6. When we're taught anything in scripture, it must be considered in the light of the whole body of truth. We cannot isolate God's promises from any conditions that may be attached to them or from the other commands and principles found in the Bible. With that understanding, let's consider several things Jesus has taught us about prayer: we're to ask daily for the necessities of life; we're to ask with faith, in Jesus' name (authority, character), for those things that will advance his kingdom and bring glory to the Father. With this in mind, when we ask for daily needs to be met, for ourselves or for others, what things might God consider in deciding how to respond? (*page 65, question #2*)

7. We discussed abiding in Christ in day 2 of Unit 4, making the point that the degree to which we are able to abide in the Vine is the degree to which we are able to surrender self—a branch must be empty to be filled with life-giving sap. To abide is to live in the constant presence of someone, consciously aware of his presence whenever our mind is free. This is an ever-deepening process in our Christian walk; we learn to abide more and more completely. What effect will this likely have on our prayer lives? (page 66, question #1)
8. What changes do you think you must be willing to make to get there (for your prayer life to become what you ultimately desire it to be)? Are you willing to make them? What might interfere with your resolve as you complete this study? What steps will you take to head off such interference?

The great need of our world, our nation, and our churches is people who know how to prevail in prayer. ...Results, not beautiful words, are the test of prevailing prayer. Results, not mere sanctimonious devotional moments, are the hallmark of the true intercessor. ...Prayer is the working power of all that God would do through His people.

Whatever gets you too busy for prayer time, whatever distracts you from holy prevailing, whatever robs you of hunger for God, for souls, and for time for prayer warfare is a hindrance to God and His kingdom. You cannot afford it.

You have no greater ministry or no leadership more influential than intercession. There is no higher role, honor or authority than this.

There is no more Christlike role than to be a co-intercessor with Christ for the priorities upon His heart. In no other way can a Christian be a greater strength and blessing to Christ's church. In no other way can you do more to advance Christ's kingdom and bring glory to the name of Jesus. Prevailing intercession is your supreme service while on earth.

Wesley L. Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, pp.20-27,
ZondervanPublishingHouse, Grand Rapids, MI 1980

Unit Eight, Day One

DO WE ALWAYS PRAY, AND NOT GIVE UP?

...pray without ceasing.... [1 Thes. 5:17 NKJV]

In Luke 18:1 Jesus taught His disciples to “always pray and not give up,” through the parable of the persistent widow. In this parable a widow kept coming to the judge with a plea for justice. At first he refused, but finally he said, “I will see that she gets justice so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!” [Luke 18:2-5]

Jesus had already taught his disciples about being persistent in prayer in Luke 11, with the parable of the friend at midnight [Luke 11:5-8]. But in the order and sequence of his teaching on prayer, here in Luke 18 he added another dimension to that teaching. It is one thing to go to a neighbor in the middle of the night to seek bread for a hungry friend, but it requires quite another level of boldness to go time and again before a judge who has repeatedly turned us down.

Such a bold prayer must be well thought out. We wouldn’t take a case before a judge casually, and we would not keep going back after we had been turned down, unless we felt sure we were on solid ground. No wonder Jesus didn’t give his disciples this teaching along with the first-step basics of prayer he taught in Matthew 6. We need to be ready. We need to be grounded in our daily prayer lives [Matt. 6:6-13], if we want to come so boldly—and effectively—before the throne.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

- 1. Why do you think God wants us to learn to be persistent and bold in our praying? Why does he not simply give us what we ask, as long as we are asking for something that is his will?

- 2. What are some of the things we might pray for that we are certain he would want to do, but that might take time? Why do you think they might take time?

- 3. Is there something you are praying for now that you have been praying for a long time—perhaps for years? What is it, and why do you think God has not answered?

““Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord.’ [Isa. 1:18] This is an invitation to a court-type hearing, a court appeal at the throne of God. God asked Israel to debate its case with him. ...You do not plead like a negative, legal adversary in the presence of God the holy Judge. Rather, you plead in the form of a well-prepared brief, prepared by a legal advocate on behalf of a need and for the welfare of the kingdom.”” What follows are seven “holy pleadings and arguments” author Wesley Duewel provides: (1) The honor and glory of God’s name. (2) God’s relationships to us. (3) God’s attributes. (4) The sorrows and needs of the people—God’s tender heart. (5) Past answers to prayer. (6) The Word and promises of God. (7) The name, the blood of Jesus. [Wesley L. Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, pp.296-297,302-308, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990]

Unit Eight, Day Two

DO WE HAVE FAITH THAT DOES NOT DOUBT?

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. [Rom. 4:20-21]

In considering the step-by-step sequence of Jesus’ teaching on prayer, we see that he gave his 12 disciples several strong prayer promises in the last days and hours of his ministry. He did not include these promises during his Sermon on the Mount, when he taught his initial followers the beginning steps for prayer. Nor did he include them as he added the dimensions of perseverance and boldness in Luke 11 and 18. These late promises were for his select group of fully committed disciples, those to whom he was leaving the keys of his kingdom. They remain so today—open to anyone who chooses to be his committed disciple.

But these promises have conditions attached, conditions that only those who are mature in their faith can understand or meet. Jesus said, “...if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him...whatever you ask for in prayer, believe you have received it, and it will be yours.” [Mark 11:22-24] Believe you have received it—this is faith that believes not only that God is able, but that God *will*. How much knowledge of God’s Word, how much experience with him does it take to build faith that strong?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Why do you think Jesus waited until the last week of his ministry to share his most compelling prayer promises with his disciples? Why do you think he shared them only with the 12 disciples and not the larger numbers of followers and disciples he had taught on other occasions?

2. What is the condition attached to the prayer promise of Mark 11:22-24?

3. In what way do you think it might be easy for inexperienced pray-ers or relatively new Christians to misunderstand the appropriate use of such a prayer promise? What effect might it have on their prayer lives or their faith in God?

*“Some [scripture] promises are valid for all times and circumstances. For example... ‘For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.’ [2 Chron. 16:9] This is a statement about how God always acts. Jesus made a conditional promise, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” [Matt. 6:33] The ‘things’ ... are...food, drink, and clothing. God is concerned about our needs, and He wants us to be concerned about His kingdom and His righteousness. When we are concerned with His affairs first, He promises to provide our needs.” [T.W. Hunt and Catherine Walker, *Disciple’s Prayer Life*, p. 67, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, TN, 1994]*

Unit Eight, Day Three

DO WE ALWAYS PRAY IN JESUS' NAME?

In his name the nations will put their hope. [Matt. 12:21]

As we look at Jesus' teaching on prayer, we see that he saved the best for the last—the most significant prayer promises for the last days and hours he was with his disciples. Jesus was a methodical teacher. At the beginning of his ministry, he taught his followers the basic steps to build a solid foundation for a life of prayer. That prepared them for what he taught as steps toward a deeper life of prayer—fasting to build faith, praying in agreement with others, asking for the Spirit, being persistent and bold.

Finally, to the 12 disciples to whom he was entrusting his church, he promised that they could have whatever they asked in prayer, *if* they would meet the conditions of the promises [Mark 11:22-24, John 14:12-14, 16:23-26, 15:7,16]. One of these conditions he repeated six times [John 14:13,14; 15:16; 16:23,24,26]. How important do you think it is?

In John 14:14, Jesus stated it: “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” The promise, the condition, is to ask in Jesus' name—according to his character, his nature, from his perspective. Why would something so important not have been included in Jesus' initial teaching on prayer in his Sermon on the Mount? Why wasn't that part of his model prayer? At that time, his followers didn't know him well enough to pray in his name. Do we?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. In Biblical times a person's name represented his person, his nature, his character. We know that Jesus is the name above every name, and that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow [Phil. 2:9-10]. Just using his name invokes the authority his name represents, his sovereign authority. But his name also represents his person, just as your name represents you. We often hear that our reputation is only as good as our name—our character. So when we pray in the name of Jesus, we pray in his authority and according to his character. Does that make a difference in what we pray? Should it? In what way(s)?

2. Think back over some of the prayers you have been praying lately. In what way(s)—other than saying the words—might you say they were offered in Jesus' name? (Were they for something Jesus might have asked? Were they for things Jesus would consider important? Would answering them agree with what you know to be true of his character? In what way?) Share an example or two—

“Praying in the name of Christ is not done by merely adding... ‘in Jesus' name’ to my prayer. I may put that phrase in my prayer and really be resting in my own merit all the time. On the other hand, I may omit that phrase but really be resting in the merit of Christ all the time. When I really do approach God on the ground of Christ's merit and His atoning blood (Hebrew 10:19), God will hear me. Very much of our prayer is in vain because men approach God imagining that they have some claim on God which obligates Him to answer their prayers.” [R.A. Torrey, *How to Pray*, p.37, Whitaker House, New Kensington, PA, 1983]

Unit Eight, Day Four

DO OUR PRAYERS ADVANCE GOD’S KINGDOM?

*Now, Lord...enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.
Stretch out your hand.... [Acts 4:29-30]*

In John 14, verses 12 and 13, Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.”

What had Jesus been doing? Jesus came to seek and to save the lost [Luke 19:10]. He was preparing his disciples to establish his church [Matt. 16:18], to advance his kingdom on earth.

Jesus said that his disciples would do even greater things than what he had done, because he would do whatever they asked. And why did he say he would do whatever they asked? So that he might bring glory to the Father. Jesus was establishing a qualifying condition for this broad and sweeping promise—our prayers must be such that if Jesus does whatever we ask, according to his nature and character, it will continue his ministry, it will advance his kingdom and bring glory to the Father.

Any prayer to bring salvation to the lost, to bring the prodigal home, to bring the lost sheep back to the fold or to draw someone into the abiding life will advance God’s kingdom. That’s what our prayers are meant to do. Do they? Or, do we settle for less?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. Think back over the past few weeks. What are some of the prayer requests you have prayed that would advance God’s kingdom and bring glory to the Father if he answered them?

2. When we’re taught anything in scripture, it must be considered in the light of the whole body of truth. We cannot isolate God’s promises from any conditions that may be attached to them or from the other commands and principles found in the Bible. With that understanding, let’s consider several things Jesus has taught us about prayer: we’re to ask daily for the necessities of life; we’re to ask with faith, in Jesus’ name (authority, character), for those things that will advance his kingdom and bring glory to the Father. With this in mind, when we ask for daily needs to be met, for ourselves or for others, what things might God consider in deciding how to respond?

*“As you study the Bible, watch for how God says He will act. What God says He will do is a promise. ...We can say that the principles in the Bible are eternal and that God always keeps His promises. ...He gave us the principles contained in His Word to guide us in our walk. He gave us the promises. Our job is to learn His principles and meet His conditions.” [T.W. Hunt and Catherine Walker, *Disciple’s Prayer Life*, p.67, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, TN, 1994]*

Unit Eight, Day Five
ARE WE ABIDING IN CHRIST?

As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. [John 15:9, NKJV]

As Jesus was preparing to leave his disciples, he gave them his final instructions, including his most remarkable prayer promises. He gave them to the ones to whom he was entrusting the building of his church, and he repeated several times the promise that they could have whatever they asked in prayer. These were not casual promises, but those with conditions to be met, conditions that only mature, fully surrendered disciples could possibly understand or meet.

These promises are for committed disciples. If we but meet the condition he gave in John 15:7, it will encompass all the others. Jesus said, “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.” Jesus then explained why he would be willing to give them whatever they asked—because in living the abiding life they would bear much fruit, showing themselves to be his disciples, for his Father’s glory. He repeated this promise in John 15:16: “I chose you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

The overriding condition for all the prayer promises is the abiding life that cannot help but bear eternal and lasting fruit. From this abiding life, such fruit is borne on the wings of our prayers.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. We discussed abiding in Christ in day 2 of Unit 4, making the point that the degree to which we are able to abide in the Vine is the degree to which we are able to surrender self—a branch must be empty before it can be filled with life-giving sap. To abide is to live in the constant presence of someone, consciously aware of his presence whenever our mind is free. This is an ever-deepening process in our Christian walk; we learn to abide more and more completely. What effect will this likely have on our prayer lives?

2. What do you want your prayer life ultimately to become? Describe it below.

3. What changes do you think you must be willing to make to get there? Are you willing to make them? What might interfere with your resolve as you complete this study? What steps will you take to head off such interference?

*“In all God’s relations with us, the promise and its conditions are inseparable. If we fulfill the conditions, He fulfills the promise. What He is to be to us depends upon what we are willing to be to Him. ‘Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.’ [James 4:8] Therefore, in prayer the unlimited promise, ‘Ask what ye will,’ has one simple and natural condition, ‘if ye abide in me.’” [Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, p.153, Whitaker House, Springdale, PA, 1981]*

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