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DEVELOPING A PRAYER MINISTRY
AT WHEELER BAPTIST CHURCH
IN WHEELER, MISSISSIPPI

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Doctor of Ministry

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APPROVAL SHEET

DEVELOPING A PRAYER MINISTRY
AT WHEELER BAPTIST CHURCH
IN WHEELER, MISSISSIPPI

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To Ginger,

my best friend and biggest supporter

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PREFACE

I am extremely grateful for the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and their academic excellence offered through the Doctor of Ministry program. The church and I have both grown spiritually through this program. I am especially grateful to my faculty supervisor, Dr. Bill Henard, for his expertise, guidance, and encouragement. I could not have completed this project without his insight.

I am also grateful to the people of Wheeler Baptist Church who supported me during these three years through their prayers and also for allowing me the time I needed to attend classes in Louisville. I am blessed to have the privilege to serve these people. They are such a blessing to me, and I will be forever indebted to them for their support and encouragement.

I appreciate and am thankful for our children, Katie and Carson. They demonstrated patience and love for their dad. They are a true blessing from God. It is my prayer that they will become great prayer warriors and followers of Christ.

I am indebted to my wife, Ginger, for her continual support and devotion. She served as my editor and secretary, but above all, she is my best friend and my partner forever. She is the greatest gift from God to me apart from my salvation. Through this adventure, we grew more in love with God and one another. I am the most blessed man in the world.

Finally, I am most grateful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is indeed gracious to my family and me. I am unworthy of the love and blessings he has bestowed on me. Apart from his grace and love, I can do no good. To him be the glory forever!

Johnny Hancock

Booneville, Mississippi

December 2012

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a prayer ministry at Wheeler Baptist Church in Wheeler, Mississippi.

Goals

Four stated goals served as a means to evaluate the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was that church members become aware of the importance of prayer. A survey was given to the congregation at the beginning of the project to measure the importance they placed on prayer and their dependence on prayer in their lives. The same survey was given at the conclusion of the fifteen-week process to determine the effectiveness of the project.

The second goal was that members develop a greater dependence on God and a greater desire for personal holiness. Apathy is the disease that is destroying the church. Sermons were preached concerning sin and its consequences. Sermons and small group studies were directed toward prayer and renewal. Weekly cottage prayer meetings were conducted. A day of fasting and prayer was offered, and a 24-hour intercessory prayer meeting was conducted at the church. At the conclusion of the project, the church had a time of testimony and worship. The effectiveness of this goal was measured by personal

testimony, participation in outreach, faithfulness in church activities, giving, and the results of the church-wide survey.

The third and fourth goals were personal. My third goal was to become completely surrendered to God. I want my love for God and His people to grow and have a stronger desire for unbelievers to be converted and disciplined. My fourth goal was to increase my personal prayer time. These goals were measured by an accountability group and a personal prayer journal.

Ministry Context

Wheeler Baptist Church is located in the small rural community of Wheeler, Mississippi. According to the demographic study, approximately 118 people live within a one-mile radius of the church.¹ The Methodist church, the Assembly of God church, and the Church of Christ are across the road. There are two other Baptist churches within two miles of the church.

The furthest member lives ten miles from our church; therefore, I selected a ten-mile radius as the church's target area. The population of the ten-mile radius is 25,253. During the next five years, the population is projected to grow less than one percent. The age group division indicates that 77 percent of the population is comprised of adults, 9 percent are children, 7 percent are preschoolers, and 7 percent are youth. The median age is 38. Fifty-six percent of adults aged 16 or older are employed. Thirty-three percent are not in the labor force. Eleven percent are unemployed. The average family

¹Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, *Ten Year Church History: Wheeler Baptist Church 1998-2007* (Jackson: MS: Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2008), 5.

income is \$48,114 per year.² The education level is as follows: 35 percent have a high school diploma; 17 percent have some college experience; 9 percent have an associate's degree; 8 percent have a college degree; 5 percent have a professional degree, and 26 percent have no diploma or degree.³

The average household has 2 vehicles, and 73 percent own their own home. Eighty-two percent are Caucasian, compared to 17 percent African-American. Fewer than 1 percent are of other nationalities. The largest populated group is between 25 and 44 years old. The largest family structure within this group is married couples without children. This group comprises 41 percent of the population. The next largest group is married couples with children, which constitutes 32 percent of the population. Seventeen percent are one-parent families.⁴

Wheeler Baptist Church was founded on September 11, 1898. G. M. Savage became the first pastor and served until his death in 1935. Wheeler Baptist has had twenty pastors since Savage. I have been serving as pastor since November 11, 2007. Prior to my ministry at Wheeler, Marty Roberts served as pastor. Roberts began his ministry on May 15, 2001. He served as pastor for six years before leaving Wheeler to serve as an International Mission Board missionary to Russia. During his tenure, 150 people were baptized with 80 other additions.⁵ Sunday School grew from 68 to 108. The largest increase in enrollment was youth and children. The youth group grew from 6

² Ibid., 21.

³ Ibid., 24.

⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁵Trantham, Jean. Personal Interview. Wheeler, MS, January 22, 2011.

youth to 32 youth. The children's group grew from 12 to 62. The greatest period of growth for the church occurred from 2004-07. During this time period, however, adult enrollment declined from 73 to 72. Worship service attendance dropped from 170 to 115, but baptisms increased from 30 in 2004 to thirty-eight in 2007.⁶

My ministry at Wheeler Baptist Church began on November 11, 2007. During the first year, we had 48 baptisms and 33 other additions. Sunday school attendance grew from approximately one 100 to over 180. The average attendance for worship services that year was 200.⁷ Although additions appeared to match Sunday school growth, that conclusion was not the case. Many who were baptized did not come back to church. After discussing this problem with seasoned members, I discovered this issue had been a recurring problem for the past four to five years. Some members indicated that growth did not occur until the bus ministry began. Numbers do not tell the whole story. The story of Wheeler Baptist Church is that very little true church growth has occurred. While decisions were made, few disciples were made. Donald McGavran called for the return of legitimate evangelism. He coined the term "church growth." He determined church growth was not to be measured in "decisions," but in "disciples."⁸ Through this project, an emphasis was made on the return to legitimate evangelism. This evangelistic emphasis was addressed during the fifteen-week project.

The age breakdown for the church in 2006 was as follows: 14 percent were preschoolers; 24 percent were children; 19 percent were youth; 5 percent were adults

⁶ Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, *Ten Year Church History*, 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

aged 18-24; 9 percent were adults aged 25-34; 14 percent were adults aged 35-54, and 15 percent were senior adults. Fifty percent of the church was comprised of youth and children. After a thorough investigation, I discovered that a family had joined the church in 2003. In 2004, the head of this family spearheaded the bus ministry. The bus ministry modeled the bus ministry at First Baptist Church, Hammond, Indiana. This family had been members of that church. The pastor of the church, Jack Hyles, became the hero of the head of this family. This man would often tell me how Pastor Jack Hyles would have his bus ministry travel many miles to bring people to church, especially in the Chicago area. He went on to tell me how hundreds of those people were baptized each Sunday. He added that many of those that were baptized were never seen or heard from again. He seemed more concerned with how many people were baptized than with how many true disciples were being made.

The bus ministry expanded to three different counties in Mississippi. This service caused some conflict in the church. People could not understand why the bus had to travel so far to pick up children. The reason became clear to me. The head of this bus ministry had to find new kids to baptize. This effort caused our church's outreach program to lose its focus on legitimate evangelism. In 2004 he began a food ministry, which fed hundreds of people each month. Through these ministries, there were many decisions, but little to no disciples were made. He and his ministries were a source of great conflict within the church. Most of the adults and children who were baptized during this time were never heard from again. In the years I have been at Wheeler

⁸ Chuck Lawless. *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 15.

Baptist Church, we have refocused our outreach ministry and will continue to focus on true evangelism and discipleship during the course of this project.

During the years of 2004 to 2008, the church attracted dysfunctional personalities. There were five families who joined this small rural church during the four-year period. These families gained leadership roles in the bus ministry, youth ministry, food ministry, and women's ministry. They were unable to infiltrate the men's ministry, which caused more conflict. When I became the minister, they saw new adults joining the church. They recognized their power was diminishing, and they did not have the support of the new pastor. Their new mission became removing me as pastor.

I began removing these dysfunctional families from leadership roles; therefore, their authority in the church was diminished. The result was rebellion. First, I addressed the youth leader one Sunday evening during the Discipleship Training hour concerning complaints from church members, school leaders, and members of the community. Later that night, he disrupted the evening services on multiple occasions. Unfortunately, that evening we had approximately twenty visitors. After the services, I met the wrath of his followers. To my great delight, the women's ministry leader resigned. Her resignation was soon followed by resignations from the bus driver and food ministry leader. The most unfortunate thing, however, was that many innocent people were hurt, especially the children.

During this conflict, I became a very angry person. I had left a strong, growing church who loved me and whom I loved to enter an apparent hornet's nest. First, I was angry with myself. Then I was angry with the pastor search committee and deacons. I was also angry with the prior pastor who left this mess. Looking back, I see

God's hand was in it all. I praise God for the church and his people whom I have grown to love as family members. I thank God for breaking me in order to be able to use me for His glory. I realize that God chose me to promote unity and love in this church. For the first time in many years, the church is united.

This journey has not been easy. The church had been led by dysfunctional people. They could not have brought in a transitional pastor and expected results in years. Lyle E. Schaller states that many have accepted the invitation to become volunteer martyrs.⁹ This process to restore unity has taken three years. This effort would not have been possible if it had not been for faithful deacons. I can also not express enough gratitude for the support and prayers of the core group of church members of Wheeler Baptist Church. I could not have continued if it were not for the support of my best friend and love of my life, my wife. Above all these, I could not have survived if it were not for the faithfulness of God, even when I was not faithful.

From 2007 to 2009, there was a 47 percent decline in Sunday school attendance. Twenty-one of these were due to the termination of the bus ministry. Twenty-two percent of the decline represented the dysfunctional members leaving. In 2010, Sunday school attendance increased by 23 percent but has reached a plateau this year. Two reasons serve as the cause for this plateau. First, I believe that I have become comfortable and complacent. I have been enjoying peace for the first time in three years. The second reason is that the church is comfortable with our current stability. The church and I are in great need of renewal.

⁹ Lyle E. Schaller, *The Interventionist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 123.

Rationale

There is a great need today for renewal in our churches. Attendance, baptisms, and giving are all declining. Apathy is destroying the effectiveness of the church. New programs and ministries are being offered with little to no effectiveness. John Wesley stated, “Bear up the hands that hang down, by faith and prayer; support the tottering knees. Have you any days of fasting and prayer? Storm the throne of grace and persevere therein, and mercy will come down.”¹⁰ The answer to the problem of apathy is not new ministries but an old ministry. It is the greatest ministry of the church: an effective prayer ministry.

Leonard Ravenhill, in quoting Matthew Henry, says, “When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing He does is set them a-praying.”¹¹ My church and I need God’s mercy. Through this fifteen-week course, it was our goal to be renewed. Neither my church nor I could be renewed unless we saw the need for renewal. Our prayer journey began with seeking God and asking Him to show us what we had become in His eyes.

From my experience, in today’s post-modern world, people are encouraged to see their self-worth. They are taught that happiness is only possible through materialism. This attitude of self-centeredness and selfishness has infiltrated the church. Church ministries have become inward-focused. Evangelism has declined because of the increased love of self and a decreased love for God and others. Our church must experience renewal or die.

¹⁰Leonard Ravenhill. *Why Revival Tarries* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publications, 1986), 16.

I must teach my church the greatest secret to effective ministries and life is prayer. Ministry and lives are dead without prayer. I must exemplify this through God's word and by example.

Definitions and Limitations

The purpose of this project was to develop a prayer ministry for the renewal of the members of Wheeler Baptist Church and myself. Renewal is what is required of individual believers everyday. Personal renewal is key to revival and a spiritual awakening. Renewal is often contagious.

Renewal is a natural and necessary part of the Christian life (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:22-24; 2 Pet 1:2-11). We are to be led by the Spirit and not the flesh (Rom 8:11-15); thus producing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-24). This renewal brings spiritual maturity. Our definition for renewal will be based on Romans 12:1-2. Paul's desire was to see believers' lives transformed into the image of Christ. The definition of renewal in this project is the transformation of believers' lives into holiness in light of what God has done for them.¹²

Renewal is not movements such as the "Toronto Blessing" or "Pensacola Outpouring." These movements do not bear a resemblance of spiritual maturity described in Scripture. In my opinion, the movements do not exalt Christ.

Through this prayer ministry for renewal, it was my desire that God would send a congregational revival. I prayed for a revival that produced spiritual growth and a

¹¹ Ibid., 26.

¹² "Toward a Biblical Definition of Spiritual Formation: Romans 12:1-2" [online]; accessed 23 August, 2011; available from <http://bible.org/print/book/export/html>; Internet.

manifestation of Christ in our lives. This revival, however, was my prayer and not a stated goal. I realized only God can send a revival, and He was not obligated to send us a revival. It was our responsibility to renew ourselves daily for His glory. When His people renew themselves daily and live holy lives, it creates an environment for the manifestation of God. I prayed that I will have the attitude of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Daniel 3:17-18. “If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.” Whether revival came or not, my desire was for my congregation and me to live holy lives for the glory of God until He calls us home.

Research Methodology

The first goal was that church members become aware of the importance of prayer. At the beginning of the project, the congregation was given a survey to measure the importance they place on prayer and their dependence on prayer in their lives. After the project, the same survey was given, and the two sets of results were compared.

The second goal was that members would develop a greater dependence on God and a greater desire for personal holiness. Sermons and small group studies were directed toward prayer and renewal. A day of fasting and prayer was offered, and a 24-hour intercessory prayer meeting was conducted at the church. The goal was determined through attendance, giving, conversions, and personal testimonies.

The third and fourth goals were personal. My third goal was to become completely surrendered to God. My fourth goal was to increase my personal prayer time. These goals were measured by an accountability group and a personal prayer journal.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON PRAYER

People learn to pray by praying, but they also learn about prayer by looking at the Scriptures. By personally reading through the Bible in 2010, it was possible to identify every prayer. In studying the Scripture, one discovers four basic types of prayers: petition/intercession, confession, praise, and complaints. Numbers 12:13 is an example of a simple petition which reads, ‘Please heal her, O God, I pray.’”¹ This petition is a very simple plea to God to heal his leprosy-stricken sister, Miriam. The biblical writers express a range of prayers from very simple petitions to more complex prayer. Moshe Greenberg concludes there are three elements in prayers of request: address, petitions, and motivation.² Larry Richards identifies Genesis 32:9-13 as an example of a complex prayer. The following is the basic pattern of a petitionary prayer:

Address: “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord

(Detail): who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family and I will be with you.’”

Personal: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and all the truth which you have shown your servant.

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible.

²Larry Richards, *Every Prayer in the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 18.

(Detail): for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies.

Petition: Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau.

(Personal): for I fear him, lest he comes and attacks me and the mother with the children.

Motivation: For You said, ‘ I will surely treat you well and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for the multitude.’³

The second type of prayer identified is the prayer of confession. Psalm 51 was written by David, who had lied and committed adultery and murder. In this Psalm, David confessed his sins and pled for God’s mercy and compassion. Forgiveness was not David’s only need. James Montgomery Boice states, “He sinned because he is a sinner. Because he is a sinner, he is certain to sin again and again, unless God helps him. Therefore, he also needs an inward renewal which is described as the creation of a pure heart and the renewal of a steadfast heart.”⁴

The greatest prayer needed in today’s churches is a prayer of confession. First people need cleansing and a renewed spirit. The barrier that Christians face, however, is self-righteousness. Paul stated, “For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (Rom 7:18). He follows this with, “O wretched man I am” (Rom 7:24). Chuck Lawless correctly states,

Any genuine Great Commission Resurgence will occur only when God’s people—His church, gathered in a local congregation admit our apathy, confess our sins, turn to Him in brokenness, preach the Word in gratitude and obedience, invest personally in the lives of new believers, and give glory to God alone. It is impossible for our

³Ibid.

⁴James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42-106*, vol. 2 of *Psalms, The Boice Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 431.

denomination to refocus on the Great Commission unless the individuals who make up our denomination first do so.⁵

The third type of prayer is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. Believers in the Bible often expressed their gratitude to God through prayers of praise. From Moses' praising God for deliverance from Egypt to Peter and John rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, believers have praised God throughout the Bible. Praise is an essential element in a believer's prayer life. Paul combines prayer and thanksgiving. He writes to the Colossians, "Continue earnestly in prayer being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Col 4:2). Paul also commands the Thessalonians to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:16-18). E. M. Bounds stated, "The spirit of true prayer and of true praise go hand in hand."⁶

The most shocking type of prayer found in the Bible is, perhaps, the prayer of complaint. Numbers 11:1 reads, "Now when the people complained it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it and his anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp." Richards asks a profound question, "If complaining is so displeasing to God, why do we find so many prayers of complaints addressed to him?"⁷

To comprehend, one must examine the first occurrences of complaining.

⁵Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway, eds., *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), xv-xvi.

⁶Edward M. Bounds, *The Essentials of Prayer* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008), 19.

⁷Richards, *Every Prayer in the Bible*, 33.

Three days after God miraculously delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, they began to complain. They ran out of water and the text says, “The people complained against Moses saying, ‘What shall we drink?’” (Exod 15:24). God performed a miracle and purified the water. Twelve days later “the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness” (16:2). This time the complaint was about food. God once again miraculously provided the people with what they wanted.

Moses understood that the complaint was not against him, but against God. The children of Israel, however, failed to see this fact. The Israelites also failed to bring their needs to God in prayer. Instead, they criticized God’s leader, Moses. Richards correctly states, “This is the key difference between complaint that arouses God’s anger and what we may call ‘godly complaint.’ Rather than trusting God and bringing their complaints to God, the Israelites complained about the situation in which God placed them.”⁸ Paul writes, “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in a dark world” (Phil 2:14-15). It is one thing to go to God with personal troubles. It is another entirely different thing when people complain to others. When they do this act, they are criticizing their sovereign Lord.

This year of studying the prayers of the Bible resulted in a realization of the beauty of trusting in the Almighty God. Prayer is more than words spoken to God. It is a powerful relationship encounter with God himself. Richards captures the image of prayer by saying, “When I think of prayer, the image that comes to mind is that of a small child,

⁸Ibid.

reaching up in trust to grasp the hand of a tall adult. The adult smiles, bends down, and gently takes the tiny hand in his own. The image, one of utter intimacy, is one I return to again and again. For I know that I am that child and the adult is God my Heavenly Father.”⁹

Lessons Learned from Mighty Prayer Warriors

Abraham became known as the father of faith. He was only able to obtain this title through the patience and grace of God. Abraham made the best of his opportunities when speaking with God. He was honest and expressed his deepest desires to God. Abraham even questioned God. Through it all, Abraham learned to trust and submit to God.

Moses was the great deliverer and law-giver. He is the dominant figure in four of the first five books of the Bible. His experiences with God are recorded in great detail. Moses showed great concern for others. His prayers were not selfish. They reflected a great concern to see God glorified.

David’s name means “favorite” or “beloved.”¹⁰ David was God’s ideal king for Israel. He was the first to unite Israel and Judah and was also the first to receive the promise of a royal messiah in his line.¹¹ David, however, was a victim of sin. David’s confession and repentance over his sin with Bathsheba, his life and his family would be

⁹Ibid., 2.

¹⁰Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England, eds. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. “David.”

¹¹ Ibid.

forever marked by the consequences of his sin.¹² Although confession and repentance will bring inward peace, there may be no change in the consequences. Christians learn to pray fervently, but when God says, “No,” they must get on with their lives.

Paul was the greatest missionary that ever lived. In a number of his letters he exhorts his readers to pray and intercede regularly. Peter O’Brien states these admonitions formed part of his regular teaching to his churches.¹³ Prayer was the fuel that empowered Paul’s ministry, and Paul knew that prayer was essential for churches to grow. Paul is considered to be one of the greatest prayer warriors, often exhorting his readers to pray and intercede through short and concise admonitions.¹⁴

Why Jesus Is the Authority on Prayer

A thorough study through the Bible on prayer and prayer warriors leads to the conclusion that the greatest authority on prayer is the one who knew no sin, Jesus Christ. The Gospels report that Jesus regularly rose early in the morning, often before daybreak, to pray to his father. Late at night, he would frequently go to the Mount of Olives or some other isolated location to pray. John MacArthur states, “He practiced an unending communion between himself and God.”¹⁵

Jesus not only taught prayer, but lived a life consecrated to prayer. This practice was a lesson learned and carried out by the early church. Prayer was the key

¹²Richards, *Every Prayer in the Bible*, 114.

¹³Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 290.

¹⁴Ibid., 336.

¹⁵John MacArthur, *Alone with God* (Colorado Springs: Cook, 1995), 3.

principle that empowered the early church. In Acts 1:14, 120 disciples gathered in the Upper Room “with one mind continually devoting themselves to prayer.” When the church grew to over 3,000, this principle did not change. Acts 2:42 states, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship in breaking of bread and in prayer.” Acts 2:47 adds, “. . . and the Lord added to the church daily those who were saved.”

Prayer is a recurring theme throughout Acts, with at least 33 occurrences mentioned.¹⁶ Prayer was key to empowering the church. It was the spiritual air that the church members breathed. Where did they learn this idea? They learned it from Jesus. He urged his disciples, “Watch therefore and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

Paul exemplified a commitment to prayer in his personal life. He is found in the Scripture continually praying for his brothers in Christ. He urged the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing. He commanded the Philippians to stop worrying, but instead “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be known to God” (Phil 4:6). He urged the Colossians to “devote themselves to prayer” (Col 4:2). He revealed to the Ephesians a key principle in defeating Satan is prayer (Eph 6:18). The point is that prayer matters. Prayer was important then, and it is important now. Chuck Lawless explains in his book *Eating the Elephant* that research at the Billy Graham

¹⁶James Strong, *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 582.

School revealed that growing churches are praying churches.¹⁷

Churches today are dying because they are not praying; many churches today are dying because they do not know how to pray. How did the early church learn to pray? They learned from the disciples who were taught by Jesus. Paul prayed like he did because he imitated Jesus. “Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Why should we look to Jesus as the authority on prayer? One reason is that his disciples, Paul, and the early church looked to him as the authority on prayer. Another reason is that Jesus is God (John 1:1-4,14). Who better to teach the church to pray than the one to whom believers pray and the one who now answers their prayers?

What would happen today if Christians were to follow Jesus’ teaching and lifestyle of prayer? David Platt states, “A scene where the church radically trusts in God’s great power to provide unlikely people with unlimited, unforeseen, uninhibited resources to make his name known is great. I want to be part of that dream.”¹⁸ Christians should want to be part of that dream, but they must learn from the master of prayer, Jesus the Lord.

Jesus Teaches Us How to Approach God

The famed preacher Vance Havner wrote, “The gospel is for lifeboats, not showboats, and a man must make up his mind which boat he is going to operate.”¹⁹

¹⁷Thom S. Rainer and Chuck Lawless, *Eating the Elephant: Leading the Established Church to Growth* (New York: Pinnacle Publishers, 2003), 86.

¹⁸David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010), 53.

¹⁹William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, The New Daily Study Bible*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 2001), 41.

There is not a place for showboating where prayer is concerned. When one examines the broader context of Matthew 5-7, it is possible to grasp the importance of the prayer Jesus taught. The key verse for understanding the Sermon on the Mount says, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter into the Kingdom of God” (Matt 5:20).

Jesus demands that his hearers have a greater righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees. D. A. Carson understood the stringency of this new standard. He states, “The verb ‘surpasses’ suggests that the new righteousness outstrips the old both qualitatively and quantitatively. Anything less does not enter the kingdom.”²⁰ Few today understand what Jesus demanded. The scribes and Pharisees paid scrupulous attention to the Law and outward conformity to its demand appeared unsurpassable.

In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus taught that outward compliance with the Law must be matched by inward obedience. For example, anger in the heart makes one guilty of murder as if the outward action actually occurred. Lust in the heart suffices for adultery. The mere outward conformity to the Law does not satisfy its demands. Therefore, the scribes’ and Pharisees’ religious rituals fell far short of God’s standard. Jesus concluded chapter 5 with these astonishing words: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48). No one except Jesus has met the standard of perfection.

Matthew 6:1-18 lays the foundation for Jesus’ teaching concerning the Christian’s relationship with God and especially about prayer. The progression of

²⁰D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 147.

thoughts in these passages is closely connected. They must remain in the same structure that Jesus delivered them in order to understand their powerful truths.

Matthew 6:1-18 begins with three activities: alms, prayer, and fasting. These activities were particularly important in Jewish piety. “Prayer is good when accompanied by fasting, alms giving, and righteousness” (Tobit 12:8).²¹ Jesus begins this section of Scripture with a warning concerning giving. Donald A. Hagner is correct in his interpretation that righteous deeds, specifically alms giving, are not to be done to capture the attention and admiration of others, but our motive must be to glorify God.²² The outward action of alms giving does not satisfy God’s demand. Our motives must also be without merit.

Matthew 6:1-4

Jesus introduces the principle of a right motive in giving. This idea also illustrates the correct motive regarding prayer. Leon Morris concludes, “It would seem that, just as was the case with helping the poor, so there was a tendency for people to use their prayers as a means of impressing others with their piety. But prayer is to be a communion with God, not as a means of increasing one’s reputation.”²³ Prayer does not exist to self promote or as a means of self-worship. Prayer, according to J. I. Packer, is a

²¹Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 135.

²²Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1993), 206.

²³Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 135.

“humble acknowledgment of helplessness and dependence.”²⁴

Matthew 6:5-6

Jesus also expresses that this relationship with God is personal. It is a one-on-one relationship between God and the believer. Matthew 6:6 instructs, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and the Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” Prayer is a transaction that takes place between a person and God.²⁵ Jesus is not saying that Christians must not pray publicly, but they must guard their motives. They also must direct their prayers to him. The goal is not to be heard and seen by others, but to communicate with God and actively pursue his glory and not the glory of man.

Matthew 6:7-8

The hypocrites failed in prayer because they had a heart problem. The heathen failed in prayer because they had a “head” problem. They both thought improperly of God. The same problem exists today. Since they thought they would be heard “for their many words,” they purposely used “vain repetitions.” The heathen were guilty of babbling. Jesus prohibits all such prayer. John Stott concludes, “To sum up, what Jesus forbids his people is any kind of prayer with the mouth when the mind is not engaged.”²⁶

²⁴J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 10.

²⁵Richards, *Every Prayer in the Bible*, 136.

²⁶Jeffrey B. Ginn, “Religious Practices and Jesus’ Teaching,” *Mid-America Theological Journal* 16 (1992): 75.

Since Jesus prayed in public (John 11:41-42), he does not ban public prayer. Neither is he prohibiting lengthy prayer or repetitive prayer. Jesus was known to pray all night to God (Luke 6:12). Jesus also practiced repetitive prayer (Matt 26:44). He commands His believers to be persistent in prayer (Luke 18:1).

What then distinguishes proper prayers from improper prayers? The heathen uses many words because he believes that his many words will impress God, therefore God will hear him. The believer is persistent in prayer, not to impress his Father, but because he knows that his Father has an attentive ear and hears his prayers.

If believers pray like the hypocrites, God assures them that they will get only an earthly answer (Matt 6:2), but those whose heart and motive are correct will receive a heavenly reward. John MacArthur states, “Our purpose should be to meet every need we are able to meet and leave the bookkeeping to God realizing that we have only that which we ought to have done.”²⁷

Matthew 6:9-15

Jesus provides the church with a positive example of prayer. First, Jesus did not say, “This is what you should pray,” but, “in this manner” (Matt 6:9). The Lord’s Prayer is a pattern for prayer. This prayer does not provide the words individuals are to repeat in a public or private prayer, but provides a pattern for prayer.

Jesus began, “Our Father in heaven” (Matt 6:9). In this brief opening of prayer, there are two key theological themes that appear that govern the remainder of the prayer. The first theme is kinship of God with his children: “Our Father.” The second is

²⁷John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 360.

kinship of God over his children: “in heaven.” God’s children enjoy his resources but also are accountable to his rule. To be effective in prayer, Christians must understand this dual kinship/kingship relationship.

“Father” is referring to the intimate relationship between God and his children. Jesus was teaching a new understanding of the nature of God. There are many names for God. He is Elohim, the creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). He is El-Elyon, the Most High God (14:18-19). He is Jehovah, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exod 3:14). He is Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides (Gen 22:14). He is Adonai, the Lord. In this prayer, Jesus introduces God as “Our Father in heaven.”²⁸

How should believers pray? They should pray to a father in heaven that loves them and cares for them. T. W. Hunt states, “God has chosen to relate himself to us as a loving Father.”²⁹ No longer are believers orphans, but they are children of God. Jesus illustrates the great privilege it is to be a child of God.

Matthew 7:7-11

God hears believers’ prayers, not because of their words or favors they have done for him, or because they deserve it. God hears Christians because he is their heavenly Father. In Psalm 54, David cries out in great distress for God’s deliverance. He uses three names for God: Jehovah, Elohim, and Adonai. Today the church has the great privilege to cry, “Abba, Father.” Christians have a Father who loves them and cares for them. The first chapter in Hunt’s book *The Doctrine of Prayer* is entitled “The

²⁸James Montgomery Boice, *The King and His Kingdom: Matthew 1-17*, vol. 1 of *Matthew, The Boice Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 98.

²⁹T. W. Hunt, *The Doctrine of Prayer* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1986), 12.

Foundation of Prayer—The God Who Cares.”³⁰

When one recognizes God as Father, this fact settles the matter of resources. “Our Father who is in heaven” has the heavenly resources to abundantly meet our needs.³¹ God’s children enjoy a relationship with God that opens them up to his resources.

What a great privilege Christians have as children of God, but with that privilege also comes great responsibility. When one is a child of God, he is to be under his rule. He is to treat God with great reverence. The first petition in Jesus’ prayer is that God’s name be honored. To honor God is to hold him in the highest reverence and exalt him above all others.³² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones states,

Hallowed be Your Name does not mean craven fear; it means reverential fear of the Lord. If, therefore, we want to know God and to be blessed of God, we must start by worshipping Him. We must say, “Hallowed be they name,” and tell him that, before mentioning any concern about ourselves. Our one desire is that he shall be known. Let us approach God with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire. That is the first petition.³³

The second petition deals with eschatological kingdom. “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). This statement deals with God’s purpose in history and the fulfillment of future prophetic events. This petition looks to the time when all evil will be done away with and people will gladly submit to

³⁰Ibid., 6.

³¹MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 376.

³²Boice, *The King and His Kingdom*, 78.

³³D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 62.

the divine Sovereign God (Rev 11:15).³⁴ This petition acknowledges that God now rules, always ruled, and will always rule. MacArthur notes, “He created it, and He controls it, orders it, and holds it together.”³⁵

Jones regards the kingdom in three ways. First, the kingdom has already come when Jesus Christ was here. Second, the kingdom of God is here now. The kingdom of God is present in the hearts of those who are Christians. Third, his kingdom shall be established here on earth the day Christ returns.³⁶ Christians are to anticipate that day.

The third petition is “Your will be done” (Matt 6:10). This petition answers the question, “How can we honor God’s name?” God’s name is honored when believers do his will. As a child of God, one should gladly, instantly, and completely respond to his will in order to honor his name.

In the fourth petition, Jesus moves to the personal needs of a believer. Craig L. Blomberg writes, “The first half of the prayer focuses exclusively on God and his agenda as believers adore, worship and submit to his will before they introduce their own personal petitions.”³⁷ This fourth petition deals with food, which is man’s basic physical need.

In Matthew 6:11, Jesus petitions, “Give us our daily bread.” Bread in the Scriptures often represents spiritual substance, but in this passage bread represents

³⁴Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 145.

³⁵MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 380.

³⁶Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 63.

³⁷Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 168.

humanity's most basic physical need. For even their most basic provisions, people must continually depend on their heavenly Father. Jesus also teaches that Christians should not ask for more than they need for a day.³⁸ This points to a day-to-day reliance on God. William Hendricksen notes humility as a key principle in this petition. Even when one buys groceries a week in advance, he must still accept what is on the table as a gift from God. God is the ultimate source of every blessing (Jas 1:17).³⁹

In the fifth petition, Jesus says, "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Matt 6:12). Daily bread is needed to maintain physical health. Daily forgiveness is needed to maintain spiritual health. This verse is not teaching that believers earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others. This idea would be contrary to God's grace and mercy. If believers have experienced God's forgiveness, however, they have a readiness to forgive others through the Spirit who dwells in them.⁴⁰ The Spirit that dwells in each believer teaches and guides them. Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit "will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26), and "He will guide you into all truth" (16:13). Paul tells readers in Romans 9:1 that one's conscience bears witness with the Holy Spirit. In order for Christians to maintain spiritual health, they must do his will and forgive others.

When God's family is not getting along, their heavenly Father is not pleased. The fellowship between God and his children is distorted and the only way to restore that

³⁸Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 146-47.

³⁹William Hendricksen, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 333.

⁴⁰Warren Wiersbe, *Matthew-Galatians*, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1992), 28.

fellowship is to forgive. The fellowship with others determines fellowship with God; therefore, forgiveness is essential to prayer.⁴¹ God deals with believers as they deal with others.

The sixth petition is a prayer for protection. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt 6:13). Christians are to seek forgiveness, but they are also to seek purity. Humility and dependence on God are expressed throughout this prayer. “Lead us not into temptation” does not mean that God tempts his children (Jas 1:13-17). Believers are seeking God’s power and guidance so that they do not get out of his will. They are dependent upon God’s goodness for protection and rescue from any evil.

God provides a litmus test for those who pray in Matthew 6:14-15. “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Kent Hughes writes, “If we will not forgive, we are not Christians.”⁴² This statement is bold, but true. When God’s grace enters a believer’s life, he gives him a forgiving spirit. Those who attend church regularly and lead outwardly moral lifestyles sometimes hold grudges. Hughes states, “Such people had better take an honest inventory of their lives and see if they truly know Jesus.”⁴³ An important military official reportedly said to John Wesley, “I never forgive.” Appropriately, the evangelist replied, “Then I hope, sir, that

⁴¹Ibid., 26

⁴²R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 189.

⁴³Ibid., 190.

you never sin.”⁴⁴ Forgiveness must be given to be received, and if believers have received God’s gracious forgiveness, they will have the desire to forgive others.

Jesus Teaches the Promises of Prayer

Many Christians today have a magical view of prayer. They manipulate Jesus’ prayer and configure them into a magical formula. If believers follow the formula of believing and not doubting and using the name of Jesus, then God must do anything they ask. Prayer, however, is not magical. Jesus’ promises concerning prayer must be understood in his terms. When Christians understand what Jesus taught about prayer, they discover the great privilege and power of prayer that reaches beyond anything this materialistic world can offer. Prayer gives believers access to God to whom all material creation is subject.

John 15:4-10

John makes it very clear that the promises of prayer are only for those who have a personal relationship with God through Christ. These are the ones who will remain in fellowship. John wrote, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 John 2:19). MacArthur concludes that this verse emphasizes the doctrine of the saints. He writes, “The ultimate test of true Christianity is endurance. The departure of people from the truth and the church is their unmasking.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴Jon Stubblefield, “Matt. 6:5-15,” *Review and Expositor* 87 (Spring 1990): 303-7.

⁴⁵MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 384.

Christians have the responsibility of submitting to God's will. In John 15:4, Jesus says, "Abide in me and I in you." Believers must fulfill the obligations that God calls them to do. The power to obey and persevere is God-given. Hendricksen writes, "It is sovereign grace from start to finish, but the responsibility of abiding in Christ is placed squarely upon man's shoulders, exactly where it belongs. Without exertion there is no salvation."⁴⁶

"Abide" means "to remain."⁴⁷ The NIV translation reads, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you" (15:4). For those who do not remain in him, John 15:6 states, "such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned." This comparison is a picture of judgment for those who have never been converted.⁴⁸ Verse 5 clearly states those who abide in him (the converted) will have evidence of conversion by their fruit. Verse 2 states, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that bears fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit."

F. F. Bruce concludes, "The fruit of which this parable speaks is, in effect, a likeness to Jesus. Those who manifest such likeness show conclusively that they are truly disciples of his."⁴⁹ One can, therefore, conclude that the promises of prayer are only

⁴⁶William Hendricksen, *John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 299.

⁴⁷Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 595.

⁴⁸Hendricksen, *John*, 301.

⁴⁹F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 310.

for those who have a personal relationship with God through faith in Christ, specifically for those who are living an obedient life with Jesus Christ “bearing much fruit” (15:5,8).

Matthew 7:8-11

Does everyone who asks, seeks, and knocks receive? To correctly interpret these verses, one must understand the context of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasizes the kingdom and the glory of God. In the Beatitudes, Jesus gives us a humble picture of a Christian. In Matthew 5:13-18, he reveals the characteristics of Christians. Matthew 6:1-34 discusses how believers please God. Jesus describes the type of Christians that please God as those “who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matt 6:33). Clearly the prayers of such Christians will not be selfish, but will be directed toward God’s purpose and God’s glory. J. Philip Allison correctly asserts, “The believer should seek the kingdom of God first as a matter of highest importance.”⁵⁰

The passage continues by saying, “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (7:8). “Everyone” refers only to those who belong to God. The kingdom concept deals with rules, and the family concept deals with relationship. The family is expected to obey the kingdom’s rules. “Everyone” is not only defined as who belongs to God, but also those who are living in obedience to their Father. Those who claim this promise must be living obedient lives devoted to the will of God. John exhorts his readers, “Whatever we ask we receive from him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his

⁵⁰J. Philip Allison, “Jesus’ Ethical Teaching in Matthew 5:13-20; 6:19-7:12,” *Mid-America Theological Journal* 16 (1992): 57.

sight” (I John 2:22).

Jesus continually emphasizes the lifestyle of those who receive the promise of answered prayers in Matthew 7:9-11. These verses point to and illustrate the Golden Rule found in verse 12.⁵¹ Jesus states the two greatest commandments, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37), and, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (22:39). Christians living the Golden Rule have the right motivation, the right relationship with others, and the heavenly resources to seek, knock, and receive.

Jesus Teaches the Promises of Prayer Meetings

Scripture clearly shows that the early church believed in prayer and exercised their belief. Lawless writes, “Because they loved Jesus, they were dependent on God, and they knew that prayer made a difference.”⁵² The fuel that empowered the early church was prayer. Today the church must return her focus on prayer. Churches today must recognize that Christians cannot face this sin-cursed world without God’s direction and power. They must understand the power of congregational prayer meeting.

Matthew 18:19-20

Jesus exhorts Christians to gather and pray by saying, “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt 18:19-20). These verses are commonly misinterpreted.

⁵¹MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 445.

⁵²Chuck Lawless, *Serving in Your Church Prayer Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 15.

They are commonly taken as a promise that when a few Christians agree on any request, God commits himself to answer their prayers. The context of these verses will help define the truth.

In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus explains a process believers are to follow to settle a dispute. The words in Matthew 18:19, “Again I say to you,” clearly link these verses. Matthew continues, “that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done” (18:19). To interpret this verse as promising believers anything they might agree on does not fit the context of church discipline. Jesus assures the church that he acts with her when she is working to purify herself.

Matthew goes on to say, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (18:20). The prayer meetings God promises to bless are those who are actively seeking his holiness. When the church gathers in his name and for his glory and is under his power and authority, she has the favor of God upon her meeting.

Jesus Teaches the Promise of Faith and Prayer

Jesus promises, “Whatever things you ask in prayer believing, you will receive” (Matt 21:22). Today many view believing or faith as an obstacle, but it is actually encouragement. The obstacle is not faith but doubt. Doubt is the obstacle that hinders answers to our prayers. To understand this promise, one must look at the context in which this verse is found.

Matthew 21 begins with Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In verse 12 he cleanses the temple and says, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves’”(21:13). The temple had become a failure because

of humanity's self-centeredness. What should have been a place of worship had become a greedy enterprise disguised as worshipping God.

In Matthew 21:19, Jesus cursed the fig tree due to its unfruitfulness (or lack of faith). Jesus uses the fig tree to illustrate his point. The tree represented the spiritual deadness of Israel. The leaves represented Israel's impressive outward appearance of religion. She had a beautiful temple and practiced religious ceremonies, but she bore no fruit. One can see humanity's self-glorifying attempt at religion fail. The Pharisees attempted to accomplish religious practices through politics and money, and they failed. This practice describes churches in America today. They are trying to do church apart from the power of God. Boice writes that Paul describes religious people of the last days as "having a form of godliness, but denying its power" (2 Tim 3:5). Boice concludes, "Spiritual power comes not through politics or money, but through prayer."⁵³

When Matthew 21:20-22 speaks of faith and prayer, it must mean that no task in harmony with God's will is impossible to perform to those who do not doubt God's power.⁵⁴ MacArthur explains, "God does not build His church or build up His people by better ideas, better programs, or better methods, although such things can have a place in His work. God promises to truly reveal His power only through faithful believers who, in persistent prayer, seek only His will."⁵⁵ The believer who wants what God wants and believes will have it. Churches today will continue to resemble a fruitless fig tree unless

⁵³Boice, *The King and His Kingdom*, 454.

⁵⁴Hendricksen, *Matthew*, 775.

⁵⁵John MacArthur, *Matthew 16-23, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 282.

Christians begin praying for what God wants and believing he will provide it.

Jesus Teaches Praying in His Name

Jesus says, “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14). He also tells his disciples “that whatever you ask the Father in My name he may give you” (John 15:16). He continues in John 16:23-24, “And in that day you will ask me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be filled.”

Today there is a great misconception regarding the phrase “in Jesus’ name.” Does tacking on this phrase at the end of a prayer guarantee that Jesus will give what is asked? Is “in Jesus’ name” a magical formula that gives power to a person’s prayers? Scripture clearly teaches that this practice is a misconception. In fact, no prayers recorded in Scripture have the phrase “in Jesus’ name.”⁵⁶ John Phillips writes, “We cannot ask things incompatible with his name, with what his name represents and expect him to honor such requests. Prayer in the name of Jesus must be in accord with the Lord’s changeless purpose of bringing glory to the Father.”⁵⁷ Morris says, “It means that prayer is to be in accordance with all that that name stands for.”⁵⁸ When Christians pray

⁵⁶Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 379.

⁵⁷John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 271.

⁵⁸Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 574.

in the name of Jesus, they petition God for what Jesus would ask, what would please him, and what would bring glory to his name.

Secondly, praying in Jesus' name represents the authority with which believers approach God. Christians must never approach God based on their authority. When Peter commands the lame man to walk "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth"(Acts 3:6), he was speaking on the authority of Jesus and not himself. Paul rebukes an unclean spirit "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:18). When believers pray in Jesus' name, they do so based on his authority. Grudem writes, "Praying in Jesus' name is therefore prayer made of his authorization and also praying in a way that is consistent with his character."⁵⁹

Conclusion

Today there are millions of Christians throughout churches praying for revival and renewal, yet revival has not come. The reason revival has not come is not the lack of prayer but the lack of understanding prayer. Christians do not know how to pray. The authority on prayer is Jesus. In Luke 11:1, his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray." Jones writes, "We need not turn to him and ask him, 'Lord teach us how to pray.' He has done so already. We have but to put into practice the principles he has taught us so plainly in the model prayer."⁶⁰

Prayer ministries will remain ineffective until churches return to the principles that Jesus teaches about prayer. Until believers humbly approach God with great gratitude, seeking forgiveness and seeking his will, revival will not come. Instead of

⁵⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 379.

⁶⁰Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 66.

praying for revival, believers must pray for repentance, as 2 Chronicles 7:14 states, “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

Jeff Iorg says, “We must begin with collective admission to God that we are powerless. We begin by acknowledging not how much we have to offer God, but how desperate we are for Him to work in us. We must humble ourselves and ask God to use us to bring the gospel to others.”⁶¹ This writer is desperately longing for God to use his family, his church family, and himself to bring glory to the name of Jesus through a great revival. God has provided scripture and history to promise that he can send a sweeping revival. The prayer of this writer is that through this project, he will see deep repentance, fervent evangelism, and a return to corporate prayer that brings glory to God.

⁶¹Jeff Iorg, “North America as a Mission Field,” in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God’s Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 229.

CHAPTER 3

THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL RATIONALE OF PRAYER MEETINGS

Chapter 3 investigates the theoretical and rationale framework for this project. Three areas are investigated. First, prayer must be emphasized as a priority in churches. The challenges the local churches encounter regarding prayer are discussed next. The last area that is covered is the best approach to incorporate an effective prayer ministry within a local church.

The Priority of Prayer

For the last sixty years there has been a decline in baptisms. In 1950, Southern Baptists baptized 376,085 persons. In 2008, baptisms decreased ten percent to 348, 085.¹ In 2010, Southern Baptist churches recorded only 332,321 baptisms. There was only 1 baptism for every 48 Southern Baptists. In 1950, the ratio for baptisms was 1 per every 19 church members. Church attendance and Sunday school enrollment in 2010 also declined for the fourth year in a row.² In 2010, the International Mission Board received 145.6 million dollars in Lottie Moon offerings. This offering was thirty million dollars

¹Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway, *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 34.

²Russ Rankin, "Southern Baptists Decline in Baptisms, Membership, and Attendance" [on-line]; accessed 13 October 2011; available from www.lifeway.com/ArticleView/Southern-Baptists-Decline-in-Baptisms-Membership-Attendance; Internet.

short of its goal. The number of foreign missionaries decreased from 5,656 in 2009 to 5,000 in 2010.³

Immorality in America has exploded in the last forty years. Adultery, divorce, premarital sex, and homosexuality have risen at an astonishing rate. Divorce rates within the church mirror those of the unchurched. The sanctity of marriage is under attack.⁴ The nation and churches are in a state of spiritual emergency.

Christianity is under attack from powerful entertainment industries that promote an anti-Christian message.⁵ The higher educational systems in America also attack the integrity of God's Word. The result is a philosophical change in the culture. In 2008, the Barna Group conducted a survey which revealed that only nine percent of American adults held a biblical world-view. A biblical world-view is defined as believing in absolute truths.⁶

Why Have Prayer Meetings?

The church has attempted to respond to the changing culture with new programs and ministries. It is encouraging that many churches have ministries such as FAITH Sunday School Strategy. Churches are making a concerted effort to implement

³IMB staff, "Lottie Moon offering tops 145.6 million in 2010" [on-line]; accessed 13 October 2011; available from <http://www.imb.org/main/news/details>; Internet.

⁴J. William Bennett, *The Index of Leading Culture Indicators* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 47.

⁵Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs. America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), 75-78.

⁶The Barna Group, "Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview Among Christians Over the Past 13 Years" [on-line]; accessed 10 October 2011; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/>; Internet.

apologetics into their witnessing programs. Although churches have specialized ministries and ministers, the church is declining. One reason for this decline is the neglect of prayer, which is the church's greatest ministry. Gregory Frizzell writes, "Today we have far more methods and strategies than ever. Modern believers have endless options for involvement in church activities. Yet during this same period of massive program expansion, something happened to most midweek prayer meetings. For all intents and purposes churches ceased prayer meetings!"⁷

John Franklin's studies of church history and interviews with experts led him to conclude that there was not a single example in which the church transformed the culture when Christians did not spend significant time praying together.⁸ Franklin writes, "The greatest workings of God come by corporate prayer, and we will not see the power of God in sufficient measure to transform the world around us until we pray together. As a leader you must make praying together a priority equal to preaching and teaching."⁹

The book of Acts demonstrates the importance of prayer meetings in the early church. In Acts 1, 120 followers of Christ prayed in one accord before the filling of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. They also prayed for wisdom for Judas's replacement (Acts 1:24). When the Sanhedrin threatened the church, they cried out to God in accord for boldness to proclaim the gospel, and the place was shaken (Acts 4:24, 31). In Acts 6, the church interceded for the seven to serve the widows. When Peter was in prison, the church

⁷Gregory R. Frizzell, *Biblical Patterns for Powerful Church Prayer Meetings* (Memphis, TN: The Master Design, 1999), 12.

⁸John Franklin, *And the Place Was Shaken* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 16.

⁹*Ibid.*, 4.

constantly prayed to God, and God miraculously delivered him (Acts 12:5). Acts 13:1-2 records the prophets and teachers praying and fasting before sending Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

Satan realized the importance of prayer. In Acts 16:16, Satan is seen attempting to disrupt a prayer meeting. While Paul and Silas prayed, an earthquake occurred that resulted in their release from prison and the jailor's conversion (Acts 16:25). Paul prayed with all the Ephesian elders in Acts 20: 36. Finally, Paul was seen praying with believers of Tyre in Acts 21:5. The early church recognized that they could not survive this tough world without God's intervention. Prayer meetings were a key to success of the early church.

Today's churches are declining, not because of the lack of programs, but the lack of genuine prayer. When past generations returned to God in fervent prayer, they discovered that God has not lost his power to transform a sinful society.¹⁰ Prayer must be a top priority in churches because prayer is essential in spiritual growth, church growth, and decision-making.

Spiritual Growth

A devoted prayer life is essential for spiritual growth. Kenneth Boa observes, "Spiritual growth is impossible apart from the practice of prayer. Just as the key to quality 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

¹⁰Frizzell, *Biblical Patterns for Powerful Church Prayer Meetings*, 7.

speaking to him in prayer and listening to his voice in Scripture.”¹¹ God empowers believers to love and walk humbly before him and humanity. Prayer is the secret to receiving the power to grow in Christ. People are weak in the flesh and are in need of help to accomplish God’s will. E. M. Bounds writes, “Prayer enables man to act in all these things according to the Divine Will.”¹² Bounds continues, “Nothing is more important to God than prayer in dealing with mankind. Failure to pray is failure along the whole line of life. It is failure of duty, service, and spiritual progress. God must help man by prayer. He who does not pray, therefore, robs himself of God’s help and places God where he cannot help man.”¹³ God works through the prayers of his people, and when Christians fail to pray, there will be a spiritual decline. Prayer must be a priority in a believer’s spiritual life.

Church Growth

For churches to experience growth, prayer must prevail. Pastors of growing churches affirm the importance of prayer. In John Maxwell’s list of six keys to church growth, the number one key is prayer. Maxwell says, “Every time I have had a breakthrough in growth and life of my church, it has been because of intentional prayer.”¹⁴

George Barna identified churches that stood out from others because of their

¹¹Kenneth Boa, *Handbook to Prayer: Praying Scripture Back to God* (Atlanta: Trinity House Publishers, 1993), 1.

¹²E. M. Bounds, *The Possibilities of Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1984), 4.

¹³E. M. Bounds, *The Weapon of Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 4.

extraordinary vitality of the congregation and its positive impact on the surrounding community. He identified that prayer was the secret to their ministry. “The call to prayer,” Barna says, “was the battle cry of the congregation. It rallied the troops. These people understood the power of prayer.”¹⁵

Churches that grow understand the importance of prayer and make prayer a priority. They recognize that growth is a gift from God. These churches know that their allegiance and dependence is on God. Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matt 16:18). Paul recognized the priority of God’s role in church growth when he stated, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (1 Cor 3:6). Churches that will experience biblical church growth must utilize methods and programs, but they must also carry out the ministries in prayer and in total dependence on God. Thom Rainer writes, “While good methodologies abound, if everything you do in your church is not bathed in prayer, your efforts will prove fruitless.”¹⁶

Church Health

According to Chuck Lawless, most writers identify five purposes of the early church: (1) Worship (Acts 2:43, 46-47a); (2) Evangelism (Acts 47b); (3) Discipleship (Acts 2:42); (4) Ministry/Service (Acts 2:44-45); (5) Fellowship (Acts 2:42, 46).¹⁷ Lawless recognizes a sixth purpose. “They were continually devoting themselves

¹⁴C. Peter Wagner, *Churches That Pray* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 79-80.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁶Thom S. Rainer and Chuck Lawless, *Eating the Elephant: Leading the Established Church to Growth* (New York: Pinnacle Publishers, 2003), 144.

¹⁷Chuck Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 150.

to the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Lawless emphasizes that prayer was a vital part of the church's life.¹⁸

Prayer was a vital part of the early church and must be a priority in today's churches. Lawless states, "Prayer was non-negotiable in the life of their church as it should be in today's church. God expects us to pray, and he expects us to grow healthy churches that focus on praying."¹⁹ Healthy churches will encounter the enemy but will have the resolve to stand and defeat him. Prayer is the power supply for victory. The enemy realizes that prayer is key to victory; therefore, he targets a believer's prayer life. Healthy churches stand armed and are not caught off guard.²⁰ Today's churches are sick and dying because prayer is not a priority.

Church Decision Making

Shannon O'Dell states, "Growing means changing. If you are called to lead and you do it, you will grow and change. If you are influencing lives and those lives are changed, get ready for conflict, because change and growth almost always follow a very predictable order: change, conflict, and growth."²¹ If churches and denominations continue to live like the 1950's, they will become irrelevant. Churches must not change morals or spiritual obligations, but they must kill sacred cows. If programs and strategies are not largely effective, they should be eliminated. There is a great need for obedient

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 152.

²⁰Ibid., 164.

²¹Shannon O'Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2010), 81.

leaders to step out and eliminate ministries that are just surviving and not thriving. Bureaucracy and tradition are crippling churches and denominations, but there are positive signs of change in some churches. Leaders are stepping forward and recommending a new direction. They are challenging churches to be more missional and outward-focused.

In *The Great Commission Resurgence*, Ed Stetzer writes, “America has changed, but Southern Baptists have not kept up with the change.”²² What Stetzer is referring to is the demographic change in America that has occurred over the last twenty-five years. America has changed demographically, but Southern Baptists have not. In the beginning of his chapter, he described the next challenges that Southern Baptists face. Unless Southern Baptists change, they will be doomed. Stetzer concludes change will not take place by “doomsday sermons” because Southern Baptists have become immune to them. Stetzer states, “The change that must come *to* our churches must begin *in* our churches. American churches, specifically Southern Baptists, must seek a movement of God.”²³

Stetzer is correct in stating that only God can awaken Christians to nations that live within this nation’s borders. Changes must take place within people’s attitudes, and God is the only one who can accomplish this transformation. At the conclusion of his chapter, Stetzer gave a chart of what this change may look like:

Current realities > New conversions > Discomfort and conviction > Prayer >

²²Ed Stetzer, “SBC Decline and Demographic Change,” in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God’s Mandate in Our Time* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 4.

²³*Ibid.*, 25.

Obedience > Revival > Missions.²⁴

Churches must be transformed by God in order to grow and become healthy. Stetzer studied the most common transformations for comeback churches. His research revealed the top ten areas of change in these churches: (1) prayer; (2) children's ministries; (3) evangelism; (4) youth ministry; (5) leadership; (6) missions; (7) assimilation; (8) worship; (9) small groups; and (10) organizational structure.²⁵ Prayer is the top priority. Stetzer writes, "Prayer was not just something they did before they started making changes, but it was also something they did more strategically as they were making a turnaround."²⁶ This study validates that prayer is key to change. Change is essential to spiritual growth, church growth, and maintaining a healthy church. Growth is a gift of God received through biblical prayer.

The Challenges of Prayer

Stephen Olford is an expert on prayer. He concludes, "No greater need exists in our churches and personal lives today than for a new call to prayer. Indeed, I would venture to aver that prayerlessness is the most evident and endemic sin our religious life. We cannot hope for a heaven-sent revival without prevailing prayer."²⁷ Prayerlessness is an obvious issue regarding prayer. James clearly tells, "You do not have because you do not ask" (Jas 4:2). Many times prayers are not answered because of wrong motives (Jas

²⁴Ibid., 26.

²⁵Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 192.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Tom Elliff, *A Passion for Prayer* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1998), 9.

4:3). The Scriptures emphatically claim rebellion in the heart or sin in the life hinders a believer's prayer (Ps 66:18). What are the particular hindrances of prayer life that lead to prayerlessness, wrong motives, and disobedience? The two prevailing hindrances of prayer are ignorance of prayer and lifestyles.

The Ignorance of Prayer

David Platt, the author of the book *Radical*, explains how American churches have been contaminated with values and ideals that are unbiblical and contradictory to the gospel. Today, believers have Americanized prayer and have adapted ideals that are unbiblical and contrary to the teaching of Jesus. Platt writes, "But if Jesus is who he said he is, and if his promises are rewarding as the Bible claims they are, then we may discover that satisfaction in our lives and success in the church are not found in what our culture deems most important, but in radical abandonment to Jesus."²⁸ If churches are going to experience the great promises and power of prayer found in Scripture, they must return to the teachings of prayer according to Jesus.

Postmodern America is driven by materialism. As a result of this attitude, some of America's most well known preachers proclaim a health and wealth gospel. This practice is a dangerous "egocentric gospel" that omits Jesus and neglects the cross. This false teaching promotes the idea that God desires all Christians to be materially and

²⁸David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010), 3.

physically wealthy.²⁹ One study conducted found 50 of the 260 largest churches promote the prosperity gospel.³⁰

I have been amazed at the number of people in churches that I have pastored that faithfully watch Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer. Their teachings make Christianity about man and not about God and his glory. David W. Jones, associate professor of Christian ethics at Southeastern Seminary, claims that this false doctrine is the worst thing pastors can teach. He states, “It is so catering to the flesh and it so exalts man that it gets to the point where you obscure Christ.”³¹ These false teachings have affected the way people pray. First, people pray a human-centered prayer instead of a God-centered prayer. Prayer is not used as a means of communicating with God or exalting God but treats God as a vending machine. People are taught, for example, that a prayer of faith will heal a sick person. When they pray and no healing occurs, they become discouraged. According to these preachers, the person was not healed because of their weak faith. The results are discouragement and great apathy toward prayer.

Tragically, many modern believers have no idea of what constitutes an effective prayer life. Believers must be taught God’s view of prayer and not a world-view of prayer. Christians must stop viewing prayer as only a means of meeting their needs. They must view prayer as a powerful relationship encounter with an almighty, holy God. The primary purpose of prayer is to worship him, to know him, and to be

²⁹William H. Perkins, “Prosperity Gospel Ruining True Witness,” *The Baptist Record* 135 (2011): 3.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

transformed by him.³² Prayer is not about what a believer can coax from God but what God desires to do through the believer for his purpose and glory. John Piper writes that prayer is the pursuit of God's glory.³³ Believers must be taught that prayer is to align themselves to God's purpose rather than seeking to align him to theirs. John MacArthur states, "That is when you will really see your prayers fulfilled."³⁴ The result will be God being glorified through a believer's prayer life.

True prayer is a love relationship with God. Bounds said, "When the angel of devotion has gone, the angel of prayer has lost its wings, and it becomes a deformed and loveless thing."³⁵ Frizzell says, "To view your prayer time as anything less is to miss the whole point of prayer."³⁶ Jesus teaches believers to pray to God as "Abba. "Abba" is equivalent to calling the Almighty God "Papa" or "Daddy."³⁷ MacArthur states, "The essence of prayer is talking to God as you would to a beloved parent. It is intimate and loving communication."³⁸

³²Gregory R. Frizzell, *How to Develop a Powerful Prayer Life* (Memphis, TN: Master Design, 2000), 2.

³³John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1986), 160.

³⁴John MacArthur, *Lord, Teach Me to Pray* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2003), 26.

³⁵R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 95.

³⁶Gregory R. Frizzell, *Returning to Holiness* (Memphis, TN: Master Design, 2000), 78.

³⁷James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 169.

³⁸MacArthur, *Lord, Teach Me to Pray*, 10.

During the 1980's, more than seventeen thousand members of a major evangelical denomination attended seminars on prayer for spiritual awakening. These people were surveyed about their prayer habits. The survey revealed that they prayed an average of less than five minutes each day. By their own admission, two thousand pastors and their wives indicated they pray less than seven minutes a day.³⁹ This fact indicates that Christians' love for God has grown cold. They have become so busy that they neglect their relationship with God. The result is stunted growth and powerless lives.

Today's culture is fast paced, noisy, and attention-grabbing. This lifestyle leaves no time for prayer. Believers have developed a friendship with the world and have neglected their relationship with God. Spending time in God's presence is the only way to strengthen one's relationship with him. If believers embraced prayer as a life-changing relationship with God, the church would experience a phenomenal outpouring of his power. According to Frizzell, as past generations learned to approach God in genuine prayer and repentance, their ministry effects took on nation shaking power.⁴⁰ If today's churches would return to God in fervent, biblical prayer, they could also experience the phenomenal outpouring of his presence.

Overcoming the Challenges of Prayer

The pastor must set the example. For the church to become a praying church it

³⁹Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 66.

⁴⁰Frizzell, *Biblical Patterns for Powerful Church Prayer Meetings*, 7.

must be led by a praying pastor.⁴¹ The pastor must practice a God-focused prayer life. Martin Luther once said, “There are three things that go into the making of a successful preacher: supplication, meditation, and tribulation.”⁴² Prayer is vital in overcoming daily challenges pastors face. Pastors must follow Christ’s example. He prayed all night and rose very early in the morning to pray. He also prayed before major decisions and difficulties.

The pastor must be an equipper. Lawless writes, “I became a Christian as a teenager, but no one taught me to be a disciple of Christ. As a result I lived a defeated Christian life for many years.”⁴³ Believers today are ignorant of spiritual warfare and prayer because it is not being taught in most churches. Many believers are not even aware of a raging war, and the ones who are do not know how to fight this supernatural battle.

Scripture affirms that Satan continues to attack believers. Jesus tells Peter that Satan asked permission “to sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). Peter warns believers, “Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking who he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Paul commands Christians, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11). James tells the church to resist the devil (Jas 4:7).⁴⁴ The Bible makes it clear that

⁴¹Rainer and Lawless, *Eating the Elephant*, 90.

⁴²Arthur Pink, *A Guide to Feruent Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1986), 15.

⁴³Scott Dawson, *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 105.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

Christians are engaged in a real spiritual conflict.

Why are Christians losing the battle? First, they do not recognize that a battle is raging. Secondly, they do not know how to fight the battle. Finally, many Christians do not believe Satan exists. In 2008, Barna Group conducted a nationwide survey of spiritual adults' beliefs regarding Satan. The survey revealed 40 percent strongly agreed that Satan is not a living being but a symbol of evil. Nineteen percent agreed somewhat with that perspective. The minority of Christians indicated that they believe Satan is real by disagreeing with the statement. Twenty-six percent strongly disagreed, and 9 percent disagreed somewhat. Eight percent were not sure what they believed about the existence of Satan.⁴⁵

Pastors must combat this lack of belief in Satan by teaching the reality of spiritual warfare. This warfare is not “against flesh and blood,” and it is “fought in heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). Human methods and human powers, therefore, cannot prevail in this epic battle. Heavenly powers are required to win this battle, and prayer is the key to obtaining these resources. Lawless writes, “Prayer invigorates our friendship with God, reinforces our resolve to stand against the Enemy, and strengthens the local body of Christ. Prayer allows Christians to stay in touch with the Commander during intense battles.”⁴⁶

Pastors must teach biblical prayer. When Jesus had finishing praying one day, one of his disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). The disciples realized the

⁴⁵The Barna Group, “Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist” [on-line]; accessed 9 October 2011; available from <http://www.barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality>; Internet.

⁴⁶Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, 157.

key to Jesus' success was prayer. Pastors must teach Americanized churches how to pray according to Jesus' teachings because success depends on fervent, biblical prayer. Donald S. Whitney states, "To abandon prayer is to fight the battle with our own resources at best and to lose interesting the battle at worst."⁴⁷

An Effective Prayer Ministry

How can a pastor lead his church to experience an effective and powerful prayer ministry? Prayer is the heart and soul of every successful church. Prayer, in fact, is absolutely crucial to biblical church growth. What steps must be taken in order to have an effective prayer ministry? One must examine the role of the pastor.

The Role of the Pastor

As stated previously, the pastor must set the example. Lawless writes, "I wanted a ready-made program for prayer, but almost everything I read said that a praying church begins with a praying pastor. Combine that truth with research indicating that most pastors pray no more than an average of twenty-two minutes per day, and one can see why the prayer life of most churches is anemic at best."⁴⁸ Praying churches are led by praying pastors.

The Southern Baptist Convention may suggest simultaneous prayer times and provide simple resources to equip people to pray, but it is the local pastor who will determine whether the church will become a house of prayer. Research teams at the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth have studied thousands of

⁴⁷Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 69.

⁴⁸Rainer and Lawless, *Eating the Elephant*, 90.

growing churches since 1995. Their studies revealed two recurring themes. First is the idea that prayer is essential to reaching the lost. Second is that a praying pastor is essential to a powerful prayer ministry.⁴⁹ If today's churches are to return to a biblical prayer meeting, pastors must play an essential role.

When the pastor holds prayer as a high priority, the church will follow. Bjorn Pedersen states, "On occasion, a leader will ask me what the most important thing is that he or she can do to develop a praying church. The expected and right answer is to pray for a praying church. In fact, I cannot emphasize too much how important it is for church leaders to pray and provide an example others can follow."⁵⁰

Select a Minister of Prayer

First, the pastor must be committed to prayer. Second, a prayer minister must be enlisted. This position may be a paid staff member, but most often the leader is a volunteer layperson. Research at the Billy Graham School validates the importance of having an official prayer leader.⁵¹ Lawless writes, "Most congregations with effective prayer ministries have one member who oversees the ministry."⁵² The following is a helpful job description to utilize as a guide in selecting a prayer leader.⁵³

The qualifications are: (1) Must be a faithful Christian and church member; (2) Must exhibit a strong spiritual life and an obvious passion for prayer; (3) Must

⁴⁹Chuck Lawless, *Serving in Your Church Prayer Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 27.

⁵⁰Bjorn Pedersen, *Face to Face with God in Your Church: Establishing a Prayer Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995), 33.

⁵¹Lawless, *Serving in Your Church Prayer Ministry*, 38.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 29.

⁵³*Ibid.*

possess leadership skills and be respected in the congregation; and (4) Must have a teachable, humble spirit. The responsibilities are: (1) Help ensure that prayer is integrated into every ministry of the church; (2) Enlist and oversee a prayer committee or team; (3) Plan and organize special prayer emphases in the church; (5) Promote the prayer ministry; (6) Oversee calendar and budget items related to the prayer ministry. (7) Serve as church liaison with prayer leaders from other churches; and (8) Whenever feasible, attend prayer leader training events.

Developing a Strategy

A strategy is a plan for getting things done. The best way to develop a strategy is to seek God’s direction for an extraordinary prayer ministry. The pastor, prayer minister, and other appropriate leaders will work together to develop a strategy. Pedersen developed a workable ministry plan that includes the following elements:⁵⁴

1. Compelling mission statement
2. Practical goals
3. Clear objectives
4. Specific action plans
5. Adequate job descriptions for key responsibilities
6. A basic organizational chart
7. A simple budget.

The mission statement. This mission statement must clearly state the purpose of the prayer ministry. Pedersen states, “The mission statement is the single most important planning activity because the mission statement communicates the vision in one or two simple clear sentences and all the other basics flow from it.”⁵⁵ The mission statement

⁵⁴Pedersen, *Face to Face with God in Your Church*, 25.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 27.

must be short enough that it can be easily memorized. Lawless recommends that this statement be published in church newsletters and provided on t-shirts for members that are involved in the ministry. The goal is to provide a mission statement that reflects the church's commitment to prayer.⁵⁶

The goals. Goals are statements of what is to be accomplished. The goals describe in greater detail the vision of the prayer ministry. The goals will come from the idea presented in the mission statement. It is essential to have two or three easily measured goals. Lawless says, "Clear purposes and goals provide direction as well as a means of evaluation."⁵⁷

The objectives. Objectives describe how the church is to accomplish their goals. The goals and the objectives must be challenging but still achievable. The objectives provide specific steps that will lead to accomplishing the goals.

The action plan. An action plan outlines the specific steps needed to fulfill each objective.⁵⁸ Each step must state how each objective will be accomplished. The number of action plans depends on the number of objectives. Pedersen recommends that the action plans will be stated with simplicity and clarity.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Ibid., 27-28.

⁵⁷Lawless, *Serving in Your Church Prayer Ministry*, 30-31.

⁵⁸Ibid., 31.

⁵⁹Pedersen, *Face to Face with God in Your Church*, 29.

The organizational chart. The organizational chart is a graphic of the organizational structure. This chart is essential in detailing how the organization functions and the responsibility of each person. The organizational chart will keep the ministry moving in a direction consistent with the vision of the church.⁶⁰

Developing budgets. Effective prayer ministries will require money for materials, conferences, mailings, office supplies, and promotional material. The budget must be kept simple. Items will be prioritized according to need and reviewed periodically.

Sharing the ministry plan. Sharing the ministry plan is essential for its success. This objective will be accomplished by developing a House of Prayer Task Force. The task force will suggest improvements to the plan. The members will provide creative ideas to share vision and plans. The group is dedicated to evaluating, equipping, and mobilizing prayer that transforms people's lives. It will become agents of revival in the church. It must be comprised of people qualified by their gifts, callings, and passion. This task force shall be appointed by the pastor and approved by the congregation.

Conclusion

Thorough research has demonstrated that most churches have abandoned or tragically limited prayer meetings. Frizzell writes, "There is absolutely no question that most churches have abandoned dynamic prayer patterns of revival generations."⁶¹ Frizzell concludes that, in every generation that experienced a mighty move of God, the

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Frizzell, *Biblical Patterns for Powerful Church Prayer Meetings*, 14.

common denominator was dynamic, corporate prayer.

Today churches have the greatest strategies, the best-trained ministers, and the most extensive organization but the church is experiencing a spiritual collapse. In spite of fifty years of new programs, Southern Baptist baptisms have decreased. One reason for this decline is that the programs have become human-centered rather than God-centered and God-dependent. Churches must return to the root of their power, which is the dynamic, corporate prayer meeting. In truth, prayer seems to be the only thing they have not tried.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Chapter 4 explains the methodology utilized to execute the project. This chapter examines in detail the fifteen-week project. The information in this chapter is adequate for another church to be able to duplicate the project.

Preparation

The project's preparation began approximately two months prior to the fifteen-week project. This preparation allowed an appropriate structure to be put in place to fulfill the goals of the project. On December 4, I enlisted a prayer ministry team consisting of two mature married couples. The purpose of this group was to develop a compelling mission statement, achievable goals, clear objectives, and a specific action plan for Wednesday night prayer meeti

The mission statement is "Wheeler Baptist Church believers will experience renewal through prayer, repentance, and thanksgiving." The Scripture selected was "Continue earnestly in prayers, being vigilant in it with the thanksgiving" (Col 4:2). The ministry team developed two objectives: First, Wheeler Baptist Church's believers would understand the biblical meaning of prayer and how to pray according to God's word, and second, Wheeler Baptist Church would understand revival. The two main goals are as follows: (1) to teach church members to pray through small groups and the preaching of God's word. Training seminars would be offered and special speakers invited to share

their knowledge of prayer. (2) to encourage and involve more people to pray by offering prayer ministry opportunities.

The team adopted the following action plan. First, we asked for volunteers to pray each evening between 8:00 and 9:00 P.M. for personal renewal and a church-wide revival. This group was comprised of forty men and women known as “prayer warriors.” The ministry team also selected a prayer minister. The prayer minister’s qualifications are found in chapter three.

During this period the ministry team revamped the adult Wednesday night services. The team adopted a simple corporate prayer meeting recommended by Gregory Frizzell.¹ The following is an outline and description of our Wednesday night prayer meeting.

6:30 P.M. Welcome and opening hymn

6:35 P.M. Brief testimony of praise

6:45 P.M. Scripture reading and spiritual preparation

7:00 P.M. First session of prayer for the lost and backslidden

7:10 P.M. Second session of prayer for missionaries, our church, and revival

7:20 P.M. Third session of prayer for the sick and hurting

7:30 P.M. Closing prayer

After the development of a prayer vision and the selection of a prayer minister, we promoted the new ministry through the weekly church bulletin, announcements, and on our website. The church launched the new prayer ministry on January 11, 2012. This

¹Gregory Frizzell, *Biblical Patterns for Powerful Church Prayer Meetings* (Memphis, TN: The Master Design, 1999), 27.

primary planning stage allowed the structure and the organization required to assist in fulfilling the objectives of the fifteen-week project. The project began on February 5, 2012 and concluded May 19, 2012.

Fifteen-Week Project

Week 1 consisted of sermon preparation from Philippians 1:3-11. The sermon title was “The Attitude of Prayer.” We examined the background of the Book of Philippians and Paul’s experiences in Philippi. We explored how believers can maintain a thankful attitude despite adverse circumstances. The following is the outline of the passage:

1. For whom he prays vv. 1-2
2. When he prays v. 3
3. How he prays v. 4
4. Why he prays vv 5, 7-8
5. What he prays vv. 6, 9-11

During this week, I also finalized the details of the Valentine’s banquet fellowship.

During week 2 we had a special guest speaker at a Valentine’s banquet focusing on how to pray for our loved ones. Dyer Harbor, associate pastor of Oakland Baptist Church in Corinth, Mississippi, shared from Ezekiel 22:30. He emphasized standing in the gap for others through prayer. Harbor taught men how to pray for their wives and children, ladies how to pray for their families, and students how to pray for their classmates. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of the church praying for their pastor. He provided each participant with Bible markers printed with Scriptures and

instructions regarding how to pray for his or her loved ones. Approximately one hundred attended this event, which exceeded my expectations.

On February 12, I met with all adult and youth Sunday school teachers to introduce them to the Sunday school material that would be used during a seven-week period beginning March 11. Also this week, I selected ten church members to serve on a Task Force of Prayer Team. The purpose of this team was to assist me in promoting, planning, praying, and evaluating the fifteen-week project. This team also was asked to evaluate my progress during the project. We met on February 18, 2012 for dinner at a local restaurant. During this meeting, I discussed my passion and purpose for the project.

My Sunday morning sermon came from I Timothy 2:1-8 on the importance of evangelistic praying. The following is an outline of this passage:

1. The Priority of an Evangelistic Prayer v. 1a
2. The Passion of an Evangelistic Prayer v. 1b
3. The People of an Evangelistic Prayer vv. 1c-2
4. The Purpose of an Evangelistic Prayer vv. 3-4
5. The Conditions of an Evangelistic Prayer v. 8

Week 3 began with baptism services. I shared an evangelistic sermon from Matthew 27 entitled “What Shall I Do With Jesus?” The sermon focused on four men: Caiphas, Peter, Judas, and Pilate. The task force met to confirm dates for cottage prayer meetings and a revival meeting. I secured a speaker for the revival meeting.

For the past eighteen months, I had been preaching through the Psalms. During the Sunday night service, I preached a message from Psalm 67. Some

commentaries refer to this Psalm as a “missionary Psalm.”² Others believe it is a clear anticipation of the millennial period. The Psalm has been called “Israel’s missionary Psalm” and “Israel’s millennial prayer.”³ I believe the Psalm is dealing with the millennial period, but there are clear applications for today’s church.

During the sermon, I explored this prayer for God’s goodness. Every believer must recognize their need for God’s mercy and humbly ask for it (Ps 67:1). This Psalm gives two reasons for God’s goodness toward his people. First, God’s goodness is to be utilized to reach the world for Christ (Ps 67:2). God’s blessings are not only that the world may know him but also worship him. The final stanza of this Psalm deals with the certainty of God’s blessings. The verb used in verse 6, “has yielded,” is past tense. The psalmist is so sure that God will bless that he speaks as if it has already occurred. I emphasized that we are to seek God’s mercy and blessings with confidence in order to reach the world for Christ.

Week 4 began with my introduction of a six-part series of messages entitled “Teach Us to Pray.” The text selected was Matthew 6:5-15, which is often referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer.” We examined why believers must follow the example of prayer given in Matthew 6:5-15. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray in Luke 11:2. The disciples realized prayer was the power behind Jesus’ amazing life. The disciples knew Jesus often prayed alone, and they desired to learn to pray from the Man of Prayer

²James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42-106*, vol. 2 of *Psalms, The Boice Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 545.

³John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988), 534.

They also desired to learn the Lord's secret to spiritual power and wisdom.⁴

In the Book of Acts, the disciples taught the early church the doctrines of Christ (Acts 2:42). The church learned how to pray from the disciples whom Jesus taught. Prayer was a vital key to the success of the early church. Paul also looked to Jesus as the authority on prayer because he imitated Jesus. He urged his readers, "Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). The most compelling reason to learn from Jesus is that Jesus is God, and who is better qualified than Jesus to teach us to pray?

In week 5, I began part two of the series "Teach Us to Pray." We examined public prayer in Matthew 6:5-9. Jesus revealed two ways to pray: the hypocritical way (Matt 6:5,7) and the proper way (Matt 6:6). The hypocritical prayer has the wrong motive (selfish) with the wrong audience (men) and receives a reward from man that is short-lived.

Jesus taught believers the proper way of praying involves three steps. The first step involves exclusion (Matt 6:6). Believers must shut out and forget other people and enter into their prayer closet.⁵ Prayer is a conversation between a believer and God. The second step includes a realization of who God is. God is our father. Matthew 6:6 instructs believers to "pray to your Father." The great, holy, almighty God is a father who loves, cares, and desires to bless his children.⁶ Believers must also realize that God is present. Matthew 6:6 states, "Pray to your Father who is in the secret place." The last

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *Matthew-Galatians*, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1992), 214.

⁵D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 29.

⁶Ibid., 30.

step involves confidence, meaning that believers must have a child-like faith. Jesus states, “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matt 6:8). The hypocritical way of praying receives nothing from God, but the heavenly way of praying receives a heavenly reward. According to Matthew 6:6, “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

The Sunday school teachers began teaching a seven-week course on prayer to begin week six. The curriculum they utilized was a workbook entitled *Praying to Make a Difference* by Jim and Kaye Johns. The first lesson dealt with spending time with God. The teachers examined Jesus’ teaching on prayer with an emphasis on the Lord’s Prayer from Matthew 6:5-15. Other Scriptures stressed were Matthew 7:7-8 and Matthew 7:9-11.

The Sunday school teachers also examined the incredible prayer promises of Jesus. One of those promises states, “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14). Jesus continued to promise his followers to give them to desires of their prayers, but these promises have conditions.

The teachers explored these conditions listed in the Johns’ workbook:⁷

(1) Having true faith (Matt 21:21-22, Mark 11:22-24); (2) Asking in Jesus’ name and in his character (John 14:13-14, 16:23-24, 26); (3) Praying for things that will advance his kingdom (John 14:12-13); (4) Offering prayers that will glorify the Father (John 14:13-14; 15:7-8); (5) Abiding in the Vine (John 15:7); (6) Having Jesus’ words (teachings) abiding in us (John 15:7); (7) Living lives that bear lasting fruit (John 15:16); (8) Experiencing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-20; 16:7, 13-15).

⁷Jim Johns and Kaye Johns, *Praying to Make a Difference* (Dallas: Sampson Ministry Resources, 1999), 5

The teachers concluded with Matthew 6:6. They stressed the importance of a daily quiet time seeking God's guidance and empowerment to walk daily with God. Prayer is foundational to a believer's life in building a strong fellowship with God. For believers to experience God's prayer promises, they must give God undivided time and attention. The teachers assigned daily devotional passages found in the workbooks to be read during the upcoming week.

I continued the sermon series "Teach Us to Pray" focusing on Matthew 6:9-10 that records, "In this manner, therefore pray: our Father in heaven. Hallowed be your name. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus emphasized how believers are to approach God. First, I explored the names of God found in the Old Testament and their meanings. We also examined how Old Testament saints viewed God as father of a nation. We then thoroughly examined the new name Jesus introduced to his followers: God as "Abba." Abba is a picture of a tender, loving father. This Aramic term is equivalent to the English term "Daddy" or "Papa."⁸ Paul included this word in Romans 8:15 when he said, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" Paul conveyed a sense of great intimacy between God and his children, and Jesus stressed believers must approach God with words of intimacy.

Jesus also taught believers to approach God with great respect. He told them to pray, "Hallowed be your name" (Matt 6:9). When Christians pray, they must be aware of God's greatness and holiness. To hallow God's name means to hold him in great

⁸John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 376.

reverence, to honor him, glorify him, and exalt him.⁹ Believers, therefore, must have a spirit of gratitude and humility when praying to the Almighty God.

Jesus also stressed the importance of praying for God's will to be done (Matt 6:10). Christians are able to accomplish this in two ways. First, believers are to pray and look for the return of Christ. Secondly, believers advance the kingdom of God on earth by living the gospel and spreading the gospel throughout the world until Jesus returns. To begin week 7, Sunday school teachers emphasized the importance of an intimate and personal relationship with God. The main Scripture examined was Matthew 6:9. The Johns' workbook focused on the importance of worship in Christians' prayers. First, one must be a child of God in order to pray to God as father. Believers must recognize the great privilege it is to come to God personally as children of a loving father. God's children approach God with adoration, respect, and love. Jesus is teaching Christians that prayer is a time of worship, praise, and adoration.¹⁰ The teachers assigned daily devotional passages from the workbook to be read during the week.

On Sunday morning, I presented the third part in the sermon series on the Lord's Prayer. The text was Matthew 6:11 where Jesus stated, "Give us this day our daily bread." We examined the question, "How do we pray for ourselves?" First, believers must have humility and ask God for his blessings. Jesus revealed that God is the Almighty, Holy One and a tender, loving father desiring to bless his children. In order to receive these blessings, however, believers must approach God in humility realizing

⁹William Hendricksen, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 328.

¹⁰Johns, *Praying to Make a Difference*, 16.

their dependence on him. Believers must realize they are not self-sufficient, but must depend on God's assistance to survive.

Verse 11 also teaches believers the principles of moderation and responsibility. Believers are to seek God's assistance for the most basic physical needs in life. Jesus also stressed the importance of the believer's responsibility when he used the phrase "our daily bread." God works through miraculous means, but primarily through hard work. Christians are to utilize the opportunities and resources God provides for his children to meet our needs and the needs of others. Believers' prayers and God's blessings should not be used selfishly. Throughout the Lord's Prayer, Jesus used the pronouns "us" and "our" instead of "me" and "my." Believers must seek God's assistance for their basic needs and to assist their neighbors in need.

Jesus stressed the importance of believers having a child-like faith in God by using the term "this day." Believers must have a daily dependence on God. He is not obligated to meet everyone's physical needs; only those who trust and do good.

On March 18, Robert Coleman spoke during the Sunday night service on the topic of prayer and revival. His text was 2 Chronicles 20:2-30. He illustrated through the text the connection between prayer and revival. First, he emphasized the importance for believers to recognize their helplessness and need for God's forgiveness and power. Secondly, believers must return to God and receive his assistance. Coleman used several examples of when believers sought God and a heaven-sent revival occurred. He also shared his personal experience of revival on the campus of Asbury College. Coleman preached over an hour and did an amazing job. The highlight of the project was spending time with Coleman.

To begin week 8, the Sunday school department continued their study on “Praying to Make a Difference.” The lesson stressed the importance of yielding to God’s direction. The main Scripture was “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). The lesson stressed that believers must surrender all to Christ. The results will be a fruitful life. The lesson also emphasized trusting in God. Believers are to surrender completely to God, submit to his will, and trust in his faithfulness. Daily devotions were assigned from the workbook.

The text for Sunday morning’s message was Matthew 6:12, 14-15. Jesus taught the importance of daily spiritual cleansing. We examined how sin affects our fellowship with God and our prayer life. We explored Isaiah 59:1-2 where Isaiah clearly states sin affects our prayer life. He stated, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” I stressed the importance of God’s forgiveness and also the importance of a forgiving spirit toward others. We examined Matthew 5:23-26 to determine how believers are to seek forgiveness. Matthew states, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt 6:14-15). I emphasized that forgiving someone is not a requirement to be saved. This idea would be contrary to the gospel and diminish the work of the cross and grace. I discussed Ephesians 2:8-10 that clearly teaches that believers are not saved by good works but by grace. Paul continues in verse 10 to teach that believers are saved to do good works. I concluded with Jesus’ instruction about forgiveness in Matthew 18:21-35. This powerful

parable of a man who was forgiven ten thousand talents by his master but refused to forgive his own slave of a one hundred denarii debt ends with a sobering warning, “So my heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:35).

The Sunday school lesson to begin week 9 was entitled “Asking for God’s Provision.” The teachers stressed the order of prayer. First, believers are to worship God. Next, they are to surrender their lives to God by asking that his kingdom come and his will be done through them. Then, Jesus instructed believers to ask for what they need when he told them to say, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11). The lesson stressed to need to ask and depend daily on God for the essentials of life. When believers ask daily, they are expressing total dependence on God. God desires us to live a life of dependence and faith expecting him to answer his children as a loving father would. Daily devotional passages were assigned from the workbook.

Dewayne Morgan delivered the Sunday morning message. He began by reading from 2 Kings 20: 1-11, where Isaiah came to Hezekiah to tell him that God wanted him to put his affairs in order because he was about to die. After Hezekiah prayed and cried out to the Lord, God spared his life. Morgan stressed the fact that we should always keep our hearts right and our lives in order because we are not promised another breath. His testimony is that he was taking an afternoon ride on his motorcycle in 2009 when a drunk driver crossed into his lane and collided head on with his bike. Morgan told how prayers for him began immediately after the accident. A woman stopped to wait with him until the ambulance arrived. She told him, “ I can’t do anything for you but pray.” She prayed that God would spare Morgan’s life. People were

contacted to begin prayer chains all over north Mississippi. He told of a series of events that led an Air Evac helicopter to be immediately available in the remote area where the accident occurred. This event saved his life when time was very critical. One of the most immediate concerns was the severe loss of blood that he had experienced. As blood was being given to him, it was spilling out of the wounds in his body. He told how twenty-one family members and friends gathered in the waiting room to pray. Their prayer was, "Lord, an issue of blood wasn't a problem for you in the Bible. It's not an issue for you now. We need you to stop the bleeding." The doctors were forced to amputate his leg above the knee, but the bleeding stopped.

Morgan's testimony was filled with praise for the many answered prayers that he and his family experienced during the month he was hospitalized and the time of rehabilitation. Although he suffered a leg amputation, the near loss of one of his arms, and over twenty broken bones, he never stopped praising God for the opportunities he had to witness in the hospital. A crucial part of his message was forgiveness. The driver of the car that hit him was issued her third DUI following the accident. She asked to meet him when he was moved to the second hospital to begin his time of physical therapy. He eagerly agreed to meet her because he wanted to extend forgiveness. During this meeting, he was able to lead her to Christ. He now is the statewide spokesman for the Mississippi Highway patrol's "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over" campaign. He delivers his testimony on a regular basis to share the power of prayer. He was truly a blessing to those who attended church that day.

The Sunday school lesson in week 10 stressed seeking God's forgiveness. The Johns divided Matthew 6:12 into two parts. First, Jesus instructed believers as part of

their daily prayer time to confess their sins to God. Knowing he would die on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for sins (1 John 2:2) and that Christians would be justified in him so that no one could ever separate us from his love (Rom 8:38-39), the Johns asked the question, “Why would Jesus tell us we must continually confess our sins?”¹¹

The Johns answered this question by emphasizing the holiness of God. They concluded, “God is above all holy and our holy God can not tolerate any sin in his presence.”¹² Jesus, therefore, commands believers to confess their sins as a means of sanctification. When believers sin, their salvation is not at stake, but their fellowship with God is disrupted. The Sunday school teachers read Isaiah 59:2, Psalm 66:18, Proverbs 28:9, and Ezekiel 14:3. These passages each emphasized how unconfessed sin or deliberate disobedience to God may cause God to choose not to answer a believer’s prayer.

The second part of the lesson dealt with forgiving others. God takes broken relationships seriously and demands that Christians forgive others as God forgave them. When Christians have broken fellowship with one another, it hinders their relationship with God. The Johns correctly conclude, “God is sovereign and he may hear and answer any prayer at any time he chooses; however, his Word declares several times that unconfessed sins cause 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

¹¹Johns, *Praying to Make a Difference*, 37.

¹²Ibid.

we harbor unconfessed sin.”¹³ The Sunday school teachers assigned daily devotional passages from the workbook.

Week 10 began on Easter Sunday. My sermon text for the day was Matthew 26:36-46. I entitled the message “Alone in the Garden.” When Jesus was facing the greatest trial of his life, he prayed. Jesus was in great sorrow and desired his closest friends to be with him. He wanted to teach his disciples the great importance of prayer when facing trials and temptation. Jesus taught them the essentials of humility in prayer. Jesus fell on his face and pled with his Father to remove the coming wrath that he would have to endure. Jesus followed the pattern that he gave his disciples in the Lord’s Prayer when he began his prayer, “O, my Father” in verses 39 and 42. Believers are to pray in humility to a tender, loving father.

Jesus also taught the importance of praying according to God’s will. James Montgomery Boice concludes praying for God’s will first means placing God and his interests above our own lives. Secondly, praying according to God’s will means praying according to what is in the Bible.¹⁴ Boice concludes that Jesus was thinking through biblical passages. He draws this conclusion because when Peter tried to protect him by cutting off the ear of a high priest’s servant, Jesus told Peter, “How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus” (Matt 26:54).¹⁵

¹³Ibid., 39.

¹⁴James Montgomery Boice, *The Triumph of the King: Matthew 18-28*, vol. 2 of *Matthew, The Boice Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 569.

¹⁵Ibid.

Jesus also taught his disciples the purpose of prayer. He prayed three times for the cup to be removed. Paul prayed with the same persistence asking God to remove the thorn in his side (2 Cor 12:7-9). God did not remove his thorn, nor did he allow the cup to pass from Jesus. Jesus taught his disciples that prayer is not for believers to change God's will, but that they will conform to his will for his honor and glory.

In week 11, I began a study on Wednesday nights with 29 participants on the subject of personal repentance. The study guide we utilized was *Returning to Holiness* by Dr. Gregory Frizzell.¹⁶ For three weeks we studied the seven categories of sin: sins of thought, sins of attitude, sins of speech, sins of relationships, sins of commission, sins of omission, and sins of self-rule and self-reliance. The purpose of this study was to lead participants in a desire to purify their hearts and embrace a biblical approach to personal repentance.

The Sunday school lesson focused on trusting in God's protection. The text was Matthew 6:13 which reads, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." The lesson consisted of three main topics: lead us not into temptation, lead us in paths of righteousness, and deliver us from the evil one. The lesson emphasized daily dependence for God's protection and deliverance. Daily devotions from the workbook were assigned to participants.

On Sunday morning, I concluded a five-week study of the Lord's Prayer. Matthew 6:13 was the text. The title of the sermon was "How to Overcome Temptation." The sermon dealt with three main points: the believer's temptation, the believer's

¹⁶Gregory R. Frizzell, *Returning to Holiness* (Memphis, TN: Master Design, 2000), 36.

deliverance, and the believer's confidence. First, we examined the two meanings of temptation. Temptation can refer either to a direct temptation to do evil or to strengthen our faith.¹⁷ Temptations that lead us to do evil are from Satan. Temptations to strengthen our faith are from God. The Bible teaches us to pray that God protects us from the temptation that come from "the evil one," Satan.

The second point of the sermon was the believer's deliverance. We studied the reality of Satan and his desire for believers to do evil. James 4:7-10 was examined as a formula to escape the devil's temptations. The last point examined was the believer's confidence. Believers must have confidence in the certainty of God's kingdom, the sufficiency of God's power, and the preeminence of God's glory. God is able to care for his children.

To begin week 12, the Sunday school teachers concluded the study on prayer. The lesson dealt with various scriptures and showed the progression of Jesus' teachings on prayer. The learners examined the early teachings of Jesus on prayer through the prayers in his final hours of life. Daily devotions from the workbook were assigned.

In preparation for a day of prayer and fasting, I continued my teachings in the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 6:16-18. We examined how to biblically fast. I stressed fasting must include the right heart and the right attitude in order to produce a God-blessed life.

During the Sunday morning service in week 13, we had several visitors due to a baptism service; therefore, I preached an evangelistic message from Isaiah 55:6-7. We

¹⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 202.

examined the following reasons to seek the Lord: seek his name for salvation; seek his word for instruction; seek his strength for endurance. The way we seek the Lord is through repentance (v.7) and the reason we seek is to receive his mercy and forgiveness (v.7). Finally, we examined when we are to seek the Lord. Isaiah urges readers to seek him now while his is available (v.6).

The post-survey questionnaire was administered during the Sunday school hour. The survey was the same as the pre-survey questionnaire. The purpose of the survey was to determine the effectiveness in achieving the project's goals by comparing the results of both surveys.

On May 5, our church observed a day of fasting and prayer. The fast began at 12:00 P.M. and concluded on May 6 at 12:00 P.M. The purpose of the day of fasting and prayer was personal renewal and preparing our hearts for worship.

Week 14 consisted of revival meetings. The purpose of these meetings was spiritual renewal. We prayed for God to restore believers to their biblical purpose of bringing glory to God and experiencing the fullness of God's love and power. True revival is God-sent and is a display of God's sovereign grace. We were depending on God's grace to "revive us again" for his glory and purpose.

Bengy Massey was the guest expositor. We began our revival meetings on Sunday morning with baptism services. Massey's text was Leviticus 13:1-9, 44-46. First, he gave an overview and purpose of Leviticus. He preached on the seriousness of sin. On Sunday night, he preached on the doctrine of hell. His text was Luke 16:19-31.

On Monday night, Massey shared a message from 2 Chronicles 7:15-22. First he shared the context of the passage and also the meaning of the word "glory." He

preached on the topic of “Whatever Happened to the House of God?” When the invitation was given, there was no music being played because the musicians were at the altar. The sound technicians came from the balcony and fell on their faces before the altar. The entire church flooded the altar and prayed. The music of this invitation was open sobs and crying out for God’s mercy. The youngest person at the altar was an eight-year-old boy who was saved a few weeks prior to this service. He bowed at the head of his father who was prostrate in the aisle seeking God. The oldest person to come was a ninety-seven-year old dear woman who could not bow but lay over the communion table seeking God’s grace.

On Tuesday night, Massey shared a message from Jude 24-25 entitled “What Kind of God Do You Serve?” He explored who God is and the ability of God. Due to the great movement of God in Monday night’s service, there was a sense of warfare going on in our service. If Tuesday night were to be classified as confinement, Wednesday night would be classified as liberation. The spirit of God moved freely throughout the service as Massey shared a message from Revelation 21 and 22 entitled “The City Called Heaven.”

After the service I met with Massey and his wife for the purpose of evaluating the revival services. Massey concluded that prayer was the key to the success of the meetings. He also added that his church is in need of an effective prayer ministry. He desires for me to teach him what I learned through my study on prayer and help him implement a similar prayer ministry in his church.

Week 15 began on Mother’s Day. I shared a Mother’s Day message from Ruth 1:8-16. We concluded the service with baptism. Week 15 primarily consisted of

evaluating all available data to determine if there was any measurable growth. I compared the pre-survey questionnaire to the post-survey questionnaire. I also synthesized the comments and e-mails received during the fifteen-week project. I met with the task force to evaluate the church's progress and my progress. I also reviewed notes and personal journals I kept during the process.

Conclusion

Preparation was the key to the success of this project. Weeks before the project began, I evaluated my spiritual condition and the spiritual condition of the church. After weeks of prayer and planning, I proposed a plan of action for spiritual renewal for our church through a prayer ministry.

Secondly, perseverance was vital to the success of the project. During the first week of the project, Satan attacked the fellowship of the church. This action did not catch me off guard, but the people he attacked surprised me. The conflict resulted in the resignation of the prayer minister and my second-guessing the success of the project. I also had thoughts of not continuing the project.

Prayer was the most vital element in the success of the project. When trying times occurred during the project, I reflected on Jesus' instruction, "Always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

The project was a success due to preparation, perseverance, and, above all, prayer for God's grace and power to succeed.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Chapter 5 consists of an extensive evaluation of the fifteen-week project. This chapter discusses and evaluates the project's purpose and goals. I also expounded on my theological journey and included the strengths and weaknesses of the project with personal reflections and conclusion.

Evaluation of Purpose

The purpose of the project was to integrate an effective prayer ministry. The local church's lack of attention to prayer has led to spiritual decline and ineffective programs and ministries. The Bible clearly communicates the need for Christians to pray. The great apathy of churches is a clear indication of a declining fellowship between God and his children. Prayer is an essential ingredient to strengthen a believer's fellowship with God.

The project was designed to teach believers how to pray and to assist the church in creating a renewed passion for prayer. These objectives were accomplished by biblical teachings and opportunities for believers to participate in prayer. After a thorough evaluation of the fifteen-week project, the purpose has been accomplished.

Evaluation of Goals

The first goal of the project was to make church members aware of the importance of prayer. Based on the survey results, this goal was accomplished. Each post-survey question showed an improvement in participants' knowledge and application of prayer (see Appendix 3 for survey results). I also observed individuals having a greater reliance on prayer. One example involved a block party the church sponsored during week 13 of the project. A young woman in the church was the coordinator. She experienced great difficulty in obtaining booth participants until she surrendered her difficulties to God in prayer, resulting in God utilizing this young woman to organize one of the best evangelistic events in my ministry. This event included demonstrations from North Mississippi Air-Evac, the local fire department, and an ambulance service. Free health screenings were offered. The sheriff's office conducted fingerprinting of the children. Free food, concerts, and inflatables for the children were offered. The streets were blocked allowing a safe zone for children. Hundreds of people received ministry, including over 250 children, a number totaling more than the enrollment in the local school.

Numerous compliments were made by booth participants and people in the community. One church member stated, "I wish we would do this every month," while others within the community requested this event occur annually. This block party accomplished two things. First it emphasized the importance of our church having an outward focus instead of ministries focusing inward. This block party was a demonstration of love the church has for the community. Second, it demonstrated the power of prayer. This event was made possible by a young woman turning to God in

prayer stating, “I cannot do this, God, but you can for the honor and glory of your Son.”

The second example of how members obtained a better understanding of prayer involved the building and grounds committee. The worship center is approximately four years old. When it rains, water seeps in the lower part of the sloped floor in the sanctuary. Numerous attempts have been made to stop the leak. Finally, the building and grounds committee decided that they needed to pray about the issue. The next day, a few men added more dirt and sod which resulted in stopping the leak.

During this fifteen-week process, the church and I have increased our awareness of the importance of prayer. We have experienced renewed hearts, the restoration of a marriage, fellowships restored, and souls saved. In one instance, doctors determined that a mass on a church member’s lower abdomen was cancerous. When surgeons removed the mass and performed tests, the lab work showed that the mass was benign.

Another example of God’s intervention happened when doctors had been monitoring spots on a church member’s lungs for three years. Doctors had determined the spots were cancerous and were slowly growing. His last x-rays determined no abnormalities or spots on his lungs. Both of these events occurred when the church began to biblically seek God in repentance and prayer.

The second goal was to develop a greater dependence on God and a greater desire for personal holiness. This goal was accomplished through preaching and small group studies. I received valuable feedback concerning my preaching from the task force and also through private meetings with individuals. Some of the comments include, “I discovered the true meaning of prayer,” “I know how to depend on God,” “God has

revealed the true meaning of prayer,” “I am going to place God first in my life,” and “I desire to be holy.”

This goal was also achieved by allowing participation in prayer ministries. This participation allowed his people to experience firsthand God answering their prayers. For example, the prayer warriors witnessed God answering specific prayers, which included spiritual and physical healings.

The teaching on prayer and offering prayer opportunities resulted in a 300-percent increase in our outreach ministry. Our outreach ministry was averaging nine people and has now grown to over thirty. Approximately six ladies remained at the church interceding for those who were going door to door sharing the gospel with our community. Worship service attendance grew from 78 to 105, resulting in a 26 percent increase. Sunday night attendance grew from 42 to 65, which is a 35 percent growth. Sadly, Sunday school attendance remained unchanged. The offering also remained virtually unchanged. In time, these numbers will increase. During the two-week period following the project, there was a slight increase in Sunday school attendance and in the offering.

The positive response to the day of prayer and fasting was another indicator that this goal was achieved. During week 12, I shared a message on fasting entitled, “The Missing Ingredient” (see Appendix 2 for sermon outlines). Many in the congregation revealed that they had never heard a message on fasting and had no idea what fasting involved. After this sermon, there was great excitement about the day of fasting. I was encouraged by the testimonies of individuals sharing how they were drawn closer to God

during their time of fasting. One of the highlights of this project was experiencing how my family was drawn closer to God and to one another as we fasted and prayed together.

Another positive indicator that this goal had been obtained was the great participation during the revival. Many believers renewed their commitment to God. Monday night was a visual picture of revival as believers were three-deep at the altar and in the aisles. Some were kneeling and some were on their face openly weeping and crying out to God for his mercy and grace. Some of the comments after the revival were, “Wow! God visited Wheeler Baptist Church,” and “I cannot wait to see what God is going to do.” A patriarch of the church, the church clerk, commented, “We had revival.”

The comments from Bengy Massey were additional evidence that the second goal was achieved. Massey has pastored churches for more than thirty years. He has preached more than three hundred revival meetings and has spoken at numerous conferences. Massey had also pastored a church that experienced a biblical revival. He was unaware that the church had been praying for weeks and also fasting for revival. After the Sunday morning service, he stated, “Your church has been praying.” At the conclusion of the revival meeting, he stated, “Help me implement a prayer ministry in my church like yours.”

Although no one was saved during our revival meeting, people were saved during and after the fifteen-week project. We had four baptism services during the project and one immediately following the project. These souls that were saved are a clear indication God blessed our church due to affectionately seeking him in prayer along with a change in the attitudes and actions of renewed believers.

The third and fourth goals were personal. The third goal involved living a surrendered life to God. My fourth goal was to increase my own prayer life. During this project, God taught me to depend on him, which I will discuss more in my theological reflections. I learned great lessons through my study and preparation. This experience has shaped and strengthened my prayer life. My confidence in prayer has grown. My prayers no longer include an unhealthy dose of desperation but include a healthy dose of anticipation. The responses of the church and task force were very favorable.

Project Strengths

The project methodology had strengths and weaknesses. One of the strengths was the amount of information examined in fifteen weeks. During Sunday school, Sunday morning worship, and Wednesday prayer meeting we were able to extensively study the doctrine of prayer. One amazing aspect was the excitement for prayer that was seen throughout the project. There were no signs of boredom or fatigue regarding the topic of prayer.

We examined two books on Wednesday night that received great reviews from the participants. The first book was *The Doctrine of Prayer* by T. W. Hunt. The second book was *Returning to Holiness* by Gregory R. Frizzell. This book received the most praise. During the study, I was astonished each week how God revealed unconfessed sins in men and women. The only complaint received during this study was that the time was too short.

One of the greatest strengths of the project methodology was creating opportunities for participation in prayer. Wednesday night services allowed individuals to participate in prayer. We created a group of volunteers known as “Prayer Warriors” to

pray daily for our church. Our outreach program incorporated prayer. Cottage prayer meetings allowed for a time of prayer. The greatest surprise was the excitement to participate in a day of fasting and prayer.

Project Weaknesses

One weakness apparent during the fifteen-week project was the lack of some Sunday school teachers' preparation for their lesson. The Sunday school teachers were very cooperative during the project but were in need of additional resources and instruction. If I repeated the project, I would have done a better job in assisting the Sunday school teachers with their lessons. I would have reviewed the lessons with them a week in advance. These training sessions would have allowed teachers to ask questions and be supplied with additional information and illustrations. One valuable lesson I learned was the great asset it would be to have an education minister on staff to assist during this process.

The second thing I would change about the process is I would have recruited a broader and more diverse group for the task force. The group would have met with me months before the project to assist in setting the goals and purpose for the project. A valuable lesson I have learned is that some people have better ideas than I do. I went into meetings with ideas on what I thought we should do. After hearing others' input, we left with a better plan than what I had conceived.

The third thing I would have adjusted relates to the survey. Some questions required respondents to indicate a positive response by choosing a higher number. Other questions indicated a positive response by choosing a lower number on the scale. The

lack of consistency in the direction of responses may have contributed to confusion on the part of the respondents.

Theological Reflection

My commitment to prayer has been confirmed and strengthened during this ministry project. The two theological aspects of prayer in which I was strengthened dealt with the importance of relationships and the issue of dependence. The Holy Spirit is very sensitive to relationships we have with others. In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus made an astonishing statement when he said, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” The slightest harboring of bitterness or resentment will hinder a believer’s prayer life.

During this fifteen-week project, I had great difficulty focusing during my prayer time. Certain individuals who had caused me great pain occupied my mind. I shared this concern with one of my accountability partners. As we talked and prayed about this issue, God revealed to my heart that I had never forgiven them. I confessed that sin, and God restored my focus during prayer.

The second theological issue deals with the dependence on God to change people’s hearts. Early during the project, I was dealing with a rebellious church member. I had met individually with him and his wife; however, his inappropriate behavior continued. I called a deacons’ meeting to inform them that the second step of church discipline was going to take place. They assured me of their support but first desired to pray that God would change his heart. Through these prayers for restoration, I personally witnessed this man’s heart change. I was reminded how God changed the

hesitant heart of Esau toward his brother Jacob. My belief that only God can change a person's heart was strengthened during this ministry project.

Personal Reflection

Prior to the project, our church spent months in preparation and anticipation for this new ministry. During this time, our church became aware of the importance of prayer. As we began to pray for God guidance, the church had a sweet spirit. Church attendance increased. I had a glimmer of hope that God could move in our church through this new prayer ministry, but two weeks into the project, my hope was diminished.

During this two-week period, two men nearly came to blows one Sunday night. The prayer minister resigned and a huge disagreement occurred during a building and grounds committee meeting. My wife stated, "During the first two weeks, you fired the prayer minister, disciplined a deacon, and disbanded the building and grounds committee. I do not think you will graduate." We did not know whether to laugh or cry, but we chose to laugh at Satan's feeble efforts to stop this ministry.

The next few weeks were difficult, but we persevered and stayed focused on the task. During week 9, God began to work in individuals' lives. The fellowship of the church was restored. Men and women, young and old, began to biblically confess sin. During the following weeks, people were saved and prayers were answered. I was amazed at how God transformed my life and the life of others during this fifteen-week project.

Conclusion

This project was a great experience for the church and for me. This project took us to spiritual heights that I thought were impossible. We went from great hopelessness during the first few weeks to great anticipation. The project exceeded my expectations and confirmed that an effective prayer ministry is essential for spiritual growth and health of a church.

I witnessed the young and the old fully humble themselves in fervent prayer and God visibly answering their prayers. In the weeks since the project ended, a great zeal for prayer remains. Because of the intense focus on seeking God through prayer, individual lives have been transformed resulting in a reenergized church. Last Sunday, an eighty-one year old woman, who has been in church her entire life, was born again. Two families joined the church and another individual rededicated her life to Christ.

The greatest transformation has been in my own life. I realized that no matter the severity of circumstances, God has the power of restoration. During my studies, I examined how past generations embraced prayer ministry and experienced a phenomenal outpouring of God's presence. The glorious truth is God has not changed (Hebrews 13:8). What he has done before, he can surely do again. I have had the privilege to experience his outpouring of grace upon my church family. By God's grace, we can continue to experience his power.

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine your views on prayer and the role of prayer in your life. This research is being conducted by Johnny Hancock for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will simply answer the questions before we begin the project, and you will answer the same questions after we complete the project. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Using the scale below, determine your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

- ____ 1. I pray every day.
- ____ 2. I believe that prayer works-that God hears me and responds when I pray.
- ____ 3. Sometimes I'm not very consistent in prayer.
- ____ 4. I want someone to teach me more about how to pray.
- ____ 5. I want to believe that prayer is effective, but sometimes I struggle to believe it.
- ____ 6. I would attend if our church offered a training course on prayer.
- ____ 7. I pray more when I'm facing difficulty than I do when things are going well.
- ____ 8. I pray at least once a week for the salvation of someone who is not a Christian.
- ____ 9. I pray at least once a week for my pastor and church staff members.
- ____ 10. I'm not sure that my prayers make much difference.
- ____ 11. Someone has specifically taught me how to pray.
- ____ 12. I pray at least once a week for our government officials.
- ____ 13. I have a personal prayer partner who holds me accountable for praying.
- ____ 14. I would like my church leaders to teach more about prayer.
- ____ 15. Sometimes my prayer life becomes routine, so I'd like to learn about more methods for praying.

APPENDIX 2
SERMON OUTLINES

Sermon 1 Philippians 1:1-11 “The Attitude of Prayer”

- I. For whom he prays v. 1
- II. When he prays vv. 3-4
- III. How he prays vv. 3-4
- IV. Why he prays vv. 5-8
- V. What he prays vv. 9-11

Sermon 2 I Timothy 2:1-8 “Can Prayer Change the World?”

- I. The priority of an evangelistic prayer v. 1a
- II. The passion of an evangelistic prayer v. 1b
- III. The people of an evangelistic prayer v. 1c
- IV. The purpose of an evangelistic prayer vv. 3-4

Sermon 3 Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 11:1 “Teach Us to Pray: Part 1”

- I. Context of the sermon on the mount
- II. Jesus’ practice of prayer
- III. Jesus is the authority on prayer
- IV. Jesus’ prayer promises

Sermon 4 Matthew 6:5-8 “Teach Us to Pray: Part 2”

- I. The hypocritical way to pray vv. 5,7

- II. The hypocritical reward v. 5
- III. The heavenly way to pray vv. 6,8
- IV. The heavenly reward v. 6

Sermon 5 Matthew 6:9-13

“Teach Us to Pray: Part 3”

- I. Words of intimacy v. 9a
- II. Words of respect v. 9b
- III. Words of recognition v. 10

Sermon 6 Matthew 6:11

“Teach Us to Pray: Part 4”

- I. Words of humility v. 11a
- II. Words of moderation v. 11b
- III. Words of intercession v. 11c
- IV. Words of faith v. 11 d

Sermon 7 Matthew 6:12, 14-15

“Teach Us to Pray: Part 5”

- I. Words of confession v. 12
- II. Words of surrender vv. 14-15

Sermon 8 Matthew 6:13

“Teach Us to Pray: Part 6”

- I. Our temptations v. 13a
- II. Our deliverance v. 13b
- III. Our confidence v 13c

Sermon 9 Matthew 6:16-18

“The Missing Ingredient: Fasting”

- I. Have a new heart v. 16
- II. Have a new attitude vv. 16-18
- III. Have a new life v. 18

Sermon 10

Isaiah 55:6-7

“Humble Yourself and Seek the Lord”

- I. The reason for seeking the Lord v. 6
- II. The way to seek the Lord v. 7a
- III. The results of seeking the Lord v. 7b

APPENDIX 3

AVERAGES FOR THE CHURCH BODY

Table A1. Average responses to question 1

Question 1		
I pray every day.		
Pre-Survey Average	4.64	
Post-Survey Average	4.82	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A2. Average responses to question 2

Question 2		
I believe that prayer works-that God hears me and responds when I pray.		
Pre-Survey Average	4.64	
Post-Survey Average	4.88	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A3. Average responses to question 3

Question 3		
Sometimes I'm not very consistent in prayer.		
Pre-Survey Average	3.73	
Post-Survey Average	3.15	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A4. Average responses to question 4

Question 4		
I want someone to teach me more about how to pray.		
Pre-Survey Average	3.85	
Post-Survey Average	3.94	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A5. Average responses to question 5

Question 5		
I want to believe that prayer is effective, but sometimes I struggle to believe it.		
Pre-Survey Average	2.58	
Post-Survey Average	2.24	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A6. Average responses to question 6

Question 6		
I would attend if our church offered a training course on prayer.		
Pre-Survey Average	3.52	
Post-Survey Average	3.85	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A7. Average responses to question 7

Question 7		
I pray more when I'm facing difficulty than I do when things are going well.		
Pre-Survey Average	3.67	
Post-Survey Average	3.64	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A8. Average responses to question 8

Question 8		
I pray at least once a week for the salvation of someone who is not a Christian.		
Pre-Survey Average	3.91	
Post-Survey Average	4.06	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A9. Average responses to question 9

Question 9		
I pray at least once a week for my pastor and church staff members.		
Pre-Survey Average	4.33	
Post-Survey Average	4.52	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A10. Average responses to question 10

Question 10		
I'm not sure that my prayers make much difference.		
Pre-Survey Average	1.73	
Post-Survey Average	1.42	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A11. Average responses to question 11

Question 11		
Someone has specifically taught me how to pray.		
Pre-Survey Average	3.09	
Post-Survey Average	3.67	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A12. Average responses to question 12

Question 12		
I pray at least once a week for our government officials.		
Pre-Survey Average	3.15	
Post-Survey Average	3.55	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A13. Average responses to question 13

Question 13		
I have a personal prayer partner who holds me accountable for praying.		
Pre-Survey Average	2.18	
Post-Survey Average	2.73	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A14. Average responses to question 14

Question 14		
I would like my church leaders to teach more about prayer.		
Pre-Survey Average	3.94	
Post-Survey Average	3.88	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

Table A15. Average responses to question 15

Question 15		
Sometimes my prayer life becomes routine, so I'd like to learn about prayer methods.		
Pre-Survey Average	3.76	
Post-Survey Average	4.00	
1=Strongly Disagree 2:Disagree 3:Uncertain 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree		

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A PRAYER MINISTRY AT WHEELER BAPTIST CHURCH

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The project sought to implement an effective prayer ministry for the purpose of spiritual renewal. Chapter 1 describes a detailed demographic analysis of the community of Wheeler, Mississippi. The chapter includes the history of the church and the present situation of the church. This chapter also includes the goals for the ministry project and the purpose of the project.

Chapter 2 examines the biblical and theological basis for the project. It examines in detail Jesus' teachings on prayer. These Scriptures detail the principles of prayer and the promise of prayer.

Chapter 3 deals with the theoretical and practical issues concerning the project. This chapter examines the importance of prayer in godly men. The chapter also examines the effect prayer has on growing churches.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology used during this project. This chapter describes the week-by-week action of the church. This chapter will allow someone to easily follow these procedures used during the 15-week project.

Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of this project and determines whether or not the goals and objectives were met. It also presents the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

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