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DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF PRAYER AT GRACE CHURCH
OF THE VALLEY, KINGSBURG, CALIFORNIA

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DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF PRAYER AT GRACE CHURCH
OF THE VALLEY, KINGSBURG, CALIFORNIA

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To Rachelle,

“An excellent wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.” (Prov 31:10 ESV).

And to our children

Rebekah, Karis, Andrew, and Tyler.

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PREFACE

I am grateful for all that my father, Steve Egli, did to encourage a love of learning and the study of Scripture. There is much to learn from the generations who came before us.

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it’” (Jer 6:16).

I am also thankful for the help of my project supervisor, Dr. Dustin Bruce. I appreciate his willingness to spend countless hours reading and commenting on my project.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since its founding in 2007, Grace Church of the Valley (GCV) has sought to be an equipping church, or a church that uses preaching and teaching to train and equip its members to carry out the mission of the church. The focus on equipping has helped to strengthen the church. Prayer has been a vital component of the Christian church throughout the years. The early church was a praying church (Acts 6:4) and GCV desires to emulate its example by having a greater focus on prayer in the church, both individually and corporately. This project will seek to further strengthen the church by training and equipping individuals in the area of prayer through biblical instruction and practical experience.

Context

This ministry project took place at Grace Church of the Valley in Kingsburg, California. Kingsburg is a small agricultural community of approximately 12,000 people. The church's location is along a state highway, so people come from many surrounding communities. The church is non-denominational and is affiliated with Grace Community Church and The Master's Seminary, both located around three hours south of Kingsburg. The early leadership assistance from the seminary helped the church to grow and develop. Prayer during the formative years was instrumental in the development of the church.

GCV's mission is to "glorify God by exalting the Savior, equipping the saints, and extending the kingdom." The church has focused intently on equipping the saints through expository preaching and classes on a wide range of biblical topics. This focus

has contributed to the growth of the church. The church went from 30 members in 2007 to 369 members as of February 2020. Adult attendance for equipping classes has an average of 150 each week. Equipping classes are the primary means of teaching outside of the sermon on Sunday mornings. Teaching on prayer is done primarily through modeling, which is done during the Sunday morning service and during equipping classes.

The church's focus on teaching and training has created a culture that desires to learn and an openness to growing in areas of weakness. Leadership demonstrated their openness to growing when it realized that prayer was underutilized by the church elders, in their meetings. To address this, the elders changed the format of the meetings so that they begin their time together dedicated to corporate prayer.

While the church has begun to address the lack of prayer during elder meetings, there is a realization that prayer needs to become a higher priority for the church as a whole. Although GCV is no longer a new church, it is still a young church in development. The way individuals in the church view prayer is also greatly affected by their religious background. Attendees come not only from different communities but also from various church backgrounds. Much of the church's focus is on theology because of the differences in theological traditions of those attending. GCV was founded within the Reformed theological tradition, which stands in stark contrast to some of the attendees who may come from Roman Catholic, Anabaptist, or Pentecostal traditions, among others. These traditions often approach prayer differently; some make prayer very personal, while others tend to be liturgical. Some view prayer as a great necessity, while others find little time for it.

The families that initially met as a Bible study before the church formed understood the necessity of prayer, realizing that they were building a foundation. Growth brought more people, and some of the initial focus on prayer was lost. Seeking to protect against wrong theology may have also affected prayer. People were hesitant to

pray in a manner that might be different from the modeling done at the pulpit. There may also be a concern that prayers could be viewed as too charismatic or not reverent enough.

The founding families understood that healthy churches develop by a biblical focus on prayer and the study of Scripture as modeled in Acts 2:42. The founders of GCV believed Scripture should be the foundation for church programs and has done this successfully in many areas. This biblical emphasis has been beneficial since many of those attending GCV left their former churches because of a lack of biblical teaching. The proper biblical focus has led to healthy growth in many areas of the church; however, GCV continues to struggle with prayer.

Several years ago, the church started a Sunday morning prayer meeting using Scripture as a model. Those interested in participating gathered weekly on Sunday mornings to pray before church. Many participants saw the need for prayer, but attendance fluctuated and averaged six to twelve people each week. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, none of the pastoral staff was able to continue participating. As leadership participation began to fade, so did attendance. Without individuals to promote prayer time, no new participants joined. Once leadership stopped participating, the only means of recruitment was through the weekly bulletin reminder. Though GCV attempted to address the problems, the prayer meeting eventually faltered; at this time, no current practice exists. Church leadership understands that there is an ongoing need for personal and corporate prayer.

Rationale

While biblical teaching has provided members and attendees at GCV with a solid foundation for spiritual growth, one area that the church would like to see growth in is prayer. At this time, GCV has no corporate prayer times with active participation. A lack of involvement is a concern because prayer has been essential since the beginning of

the Christian church. The early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).¹ Paul also reaffirmed the need to pray (Col 4:3; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:1; 1 Tim 2:8).

Unfortunately, knowing how and what to pray does not come naturally. Even the disciples of Jesus desired instruction and asked, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). The Apostle Paul regularly referred to his prayers for the church (2 Cor 9:14; Col 1:9; 1 Thess 3:10; Phlm 1:6). Those attending GCV need to understand that struggling in prayer on behalf of the church is a significant part of seeing people come to maturity in Christ. The Lord’s Prayer and biblical examples, along with church history, provide a clear expectation of prayer for Christians.

Formal prayer is a regular part of GCV activities but is modeled more than taught. Members and attendees will need encouragement to grow in the practice of prayer. The focus of this project will be on individual and corporate prayer and will aid individuals to see that “you do not have, because you do not ask” (Jas 4:2), and in asking, “you ask wrongly” (Jas 4:3). There also need to be prayers “earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt 9:38).

While there is doctrinal teaching throughout all of GCV’s programs, misapplication may have led to some unintended consequences. When God is viewed as sovereign over all things, prayer can lose its urgency or even feel unnecessary. A high view of God, if misapplied, can cause individuals to fail to take into account the commands of God adequately. In contrast, we also have individuals who do not fully understand the sovereignty of God and therefore need to learn to pray with that in mind. Instruction on the importance of prayer in the Christian life will help alleviate some of the challenges to prayer. Teaching a proper application of Scripture in regards to prayer should drive those in the church to pray.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

Christians ordinarily agree that prayer is an important part of their spiritual lives. Even though there may be an understanding of the need for prayer, this knowledge does not always lead to the practice of prayer. GCV desires to see more people participating in prayer. Sermons and general training will help cast a vision for prayer to the church, but on their own are inadequate to equip people to pray. The desire is for individuals in the church who, like Epaphras, are “struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God” (Col 4:12).

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to create a culture of prayer at Grace Church of the Valley, Kingsburg, California, by equipping members to pray consistently and biblically.

Goals

Creating a culture of prayer at Grace Church of the Valley was guided by four goals:

1. The first goal was to assess the current prayer practices of those attending Grace Church of the Valley.
2. The second goal was to develop an 8-week class curriculum on prayer.
3. The third goal was to use the curriculum to increase the knowledge of those participating in the class on methods of and the importance of prayer.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase the practice of prayer individually and corporately among attenders of Grace Church of the Valley.

Goals are sequential. Each goal required the previous goal to be completed before the next goal could begin. Every goal was designed to contribute to the success of the project at Grace Church of the Valley.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the current level of knowledge and the practice of prayer among members and attenders of GCV.² Conducting this assessment provided insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the discipline of prayer among attenders. Measuring this goal was achieved by administering the Prayer Practice Survey (PPS) to those attending the Sunday morning prayer class.³ Successful completion of this goal required at least 15 people to complete the PPS.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session course with a curriculum on prayer. This curriculum on prayer was developed around key biblical texts and relevant books on prayer. The goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when the panel gave a minimum of 90 percent on the evaluation criterion or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase knowledge by implementing the curriculum on prayer. This course took place during the Sunday morning equipping classes. It included one hour of interactive teaching and discussion. The class was open to all attendees at GCV who wished to participate. Measurement of this goal was accomplished by administering the PPS to the same individuals who completed the survey before class and comparing the results using a t-test. This goal was deemed successful when the t-test for the dependent samples demonstrated that there is a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-PPS.

The fourth and final goal of this project was to develop a ministry plan to assist members of GCV in putting their knowledge of prayer into practice through regular

² All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the

³ See appendix 1.

⁴ See appendix 3. Two pastors on staff at GCV, one seminary professor, one local pastor, and one layman in the church.

corporate prayer.⁵ Staff and pastors at GCV utilized a rubric to evaluate the plan's scope, contents, and application. Successful completion of this goal meant that 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.⁶

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definition of this key term will be used in the ministry project:

Discipleship. Discipleship is the process of sanctification in which a Christian becomes more like Christ. Discipleship begins when individuals place themselves under the lordship of Christ: "The life of Christian discipleship as presented in the New Testament calls for supreme devotion to Jesus through the acceptance of his lofty demands. Commitment to him must come before all other attachments."⁷

Three limitations apply to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-series PPS was dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their understanding and practices of prayer. To mitigate this limitation, survey responses will be anonymous. Second, the effectiveness of the class will be limited by the consistency of the attendees. It will be difficult to measure how beneficial the training has been for participants who fail to attend all of the classes. To mitigate this limitation, each teaching session will be recorded and made available online. Third, the equipping class has been limited by the pastoral staff to an eight-week course.

Conclusion

The Reformation reminds us that it is by Scripture alone that we gain knowledge of God. Historically, prayer has been a vital part of the journey to know more of God from Scripture. Prayer services have been a regular occurrence in many churches

⁵ See appendix 6.

⁶ See appendix 7.

⁷ Peter K. Nelson, "Disciple," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 349.

throughout history. The church has gathered together to pray for each other, the greater Christian community, and the world around them. This project aims to provide members and attenders of GCV with the knowledge and training necessary to see the great need for prayer corporately and individually. The desired outcome is for individuals in the church to grow in their relationships with God through prayer and the study of Scripture. Chapter 2 addresses the biblical basis for developing a culture of prayer. Chapter 3 addresses the historical basis for individual and corporate prayer. Chapter 4 addresses the details of the project and its development. Chapter 5 addresses the evaluation of the project.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS
FOR DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF
PRAYER

Prayer is found throughout Scripture. Adam and Eve had the unique privilege of talking with God as he walked with them in the garden (Gen 3:8). That relationship was forever changed when sin entered the world. God no longer walked among people, so he had to be sought. The first reference to seeking God in prayer occurs around the time of Enosh, who was born to Seth, “At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen 4:26). The New Testament’s more complete teaching on the triune nature of God provides new insights into prayer. While many passages address the topic of prayer, this project will look at five that particularly help shape a culture of prayer. Matthew 7:7-11 provides a foundation for the Christian’s prayer to God, who desires prayer and also gives to those who ask. While Romans 8:26-27 teaches that the Christian is not alone in prayer. Colossians 1:9-11 provides needful things for the Christian to be praying for. Finally, James 1:6-8 and 4:2-3 show the importance of faith and praying right. This chapter will argue that Scripture provides a theological basis for developing a culture of prayer.

**Jesus’s Teaching on Prayer and
Father’s Desire (Matt 7:7-11)**

God did not leave people to seek after him blindly. Seeking after the invisible God would be futile if help was unavailable. Scripture points to a God who not only can be found but also desires to be found. Matthew 7:7-11 contains one of the foundational teachings of Jesus to help his disciples understand that God desires to be sought by his

children. Because “God is spirit” (John 4:24), he is not sought as one playing hide and seek. Pastor and theologian John Calvin (1509-1564) writes that Christ’s teaching on the need to seek “is an exhortation to prayer.”¹ Jesus teaches in Matthew 7:7-11 that prayer is the method prescribed for those seeking to enter the presence of God to make requests.

Understanding the context is required to help Christians grasp the full weight of this passage on prayer. Matthew 7:7-11 appears towards the end of the first of the five discourses found in Matthew. The first and probably best-known discourse is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7).

Matthew 7:7-11 is part of the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. Jonathan Pennington notes, “There is no other place in Scripture where we find such a concentrated paraenesis, or ethical exhortation manual.”² The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes (5:2-11). Jesus then teaches that anger and lust in the heart are as sinful as the actions of murder or adultery (5:21-30). Following these teachings, Jesus states, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (5:44). The teaching continues with giving (6:1-4), laying up “treasures in heaven” (6:19-24), not being anxious (6:25-34), and judging others (7:1-6). Along with all these instructions, Jesus interjects his teaching on prayer in the Lord’s Prayer (6:5-15).

Scholars have made the argument that there is no connection between Matthew 7:7-11 and the preceding verses.³ The argument against a connection views the first discourse as a collection of talks given on different occasions and then collected by the author.⁴ However, Donald Carson points out “that there are in fact deep thematic

¹ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Calvin’s Commentaries vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), 229.

² Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 45, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 677.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Matthew-Luke*, vol. 8, ed. Walter W. Wessel, and Walter L. Liefeld, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 122.

connections” between 7:7-11 and the preceding passages.⁵ The connection is essential because Jesus not only provided the ethical requirement for life in the kingdom of God but also provided the means to carry it out.

In response to the Sermon on the Mount, Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) writes, “Immediately we realize that, we are humbled and begin to ask, ‘who is sufficient for these things? How can I possibly live up to such a standard?’”⁶ Few could even begin to stand under the weight of having to live out a single Beatitude (Matt 5:2-11), let alone all of them. When all of the requirements are added, the burden of living such a life is unbearable.

Jesus himself provides the answer of how his disciples are to bear the burden of all the requirements put forth in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus’s answer stands in stark contrast to the natural response of most people. The natural human tendency is everyone doing “what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 17:6). Jesus’s answer on how to live a kingdom-oriented life was not to try harder and rest in the love or grace of God. Instead, the focus of kingdom-oriented people should be on prayer for help. Jesus taught his followers how to pray in Matthew 6:5-15 but now returns to the subject in 7:7-11. Jesus tells his followers to “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” (v. 7). Leon Morris remarks that “ask is quite general, but the context makes it clear that Jesus is referring to prayer. The general expression shows that no particular kind of prayer is in mind; Jesus is concerned with praying as such and telling his hearers that prayer is efficacious: *it will be given.*”⁷

There are several theories for why Jesus uses ask, seek, and knock in this passage. Morris views the possibility of seeking to refer to a person “that does not know

⁵ Carson, *Matthew*, 186.

⁶ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 198.

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 169.

exactly what he should be praying” and knocking being on “a closed-door that he cannot open.”⁸ These are undoubtedly viable options; however, they do not appear to make the most sense based on the context. Lloyd-Jones counters such proposals by stating, “All that is quite irrelevant. Our Lord is simply at pains to emphasize one thing, that is that we are to show persistence, perseverance, importunity.”⁹ The argument for persistence is further supported by the corresponding passage in Luke 11. The Luke account of Jesus’s teaching is preceded by the neighbor’s importunity at midnight asking for bread for a guest (Luke 11:5-8).

Calvin also sees the focus on importunity when he writes, “There is no superfluity of language, when he says, Ask, seek, knock: but lest the simple doctrine should be unimpressive, he perseveres in order to rouse us from our inactivity.”¹⁰ The Christian cannot just sit back and be passive in this life and hope for the best. Inactivity is not an option because, as Carson states, “people do not drift toward holiness.”¹¹ Help must be sought, and that help is found when Christians seek God through prayer.

Importunity is also observed in the grammar of the imperatives *ask*, *seek*, and *knock*. W. D. Davies writes that “the two passive verbs—*δοθησεται*, *ανοιγησεται*—are obviously theological passives: God gives and God opens doors. *αιτειτε* and the other imperatives are in the present tense because asking should be continual.”¹² The idea of persistence is taken a step further by MacArthur, who notes, “The idea is that of continuance and constancy ‘Keep on asking; keep on seeking; keep on knocking.’ We also see a progression of intensity in the three verbs, from simple asking to the more

⁸ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 170.

⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 200.

¹⁰ Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, 229.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God’s Word*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Crossways Books, 2006), 23.

¹² Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 679.

aggressive seeking to still more aggressive knocking.”¹³ Importunity leads to ongoing prayer, and the greater the need is, the more aggressive the asking, seeking, and knocking is.

Aggressiveness in prayer is not to be carried out in a manner similar to the priests of Baal who “cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them” (1 Kgs 18:28). Instead, the Christian is to be fervent like the widow who was persistent until her request was granted (Luke 18:3). Craig Keener notes that “Jesus was not speaking figuratively but training his disciples to express bold faith.”¹⁴ Christ assures his followers that bold perseverance bears fruit because God answers prayer. The one “who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (Matt 7:8).

In reference to Matthew 7:7-8, MacArthur states, “Here is one of the Lord’s greatest and most comprehensive promises to those who belong to Him, to those who are His children and citizens of His kingdom.”¹⁵ While the promises of Jesus are comprehensive, they should not be viewed as a blanket claim for the things of God. Morris observes that Jesus “lays down no conditions, such as prayer in faith or in accordance with the will of God. Such things are made clear elsewhere and can be assumed. He concentrates on the wonderful truth that the Father gives to those who ask him.”¹⁶

The language used in the Sermon on the Mount clearly distinguishes between those who are and are not children of God. Davies points out that “the striking, unqualified ‘all’ should not be taken absolutely for in 6:5 and 7 we have met those whose

¹³ John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 444.

¹⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 1* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 160.

¹⁵ MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 442.

¹⁶ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 171.

prayers God presumably does not answer. ‘All’ must refer to ‘the sons of the kingdom’ (13:38), all those who count as the salt of the earth and the ‘light of the world’ (5:13-16).¹⁷ The primary audience for the Sermon on the Mount was the disciples, with the crowd listening on the outskirts (Matt 5:1).

To further substantiate the point that God answers prayer, Jesus gives two illustrations using family relations in Matthew 7:9-11. Each illustration contains a rhetorical question in which the answer should be obvious. What parent would give their child a stone in place of bread or a snake instead of a fish? The answer, of course, is that no parent would do such a thing. Jesus is pointing out that even parents in a sinful world can give good things to their children. Calvin writes, “And the only reason for this is that God, from whom all fatherhood descends (Eph 3:15), instils a fraction of His own goodness into ‘their hearts. But if these little drops have such effect, what may we hope to see from the inexhaustible ocean itself?’”¹⁸

Keener points out that Jesus uses the illustrations as part of a “familiar Jewish method of arguing by a ‘how much more’ analogy.”¹⁹ Because a human parent knows how to give good gifts, how much more will God “give good things to those who ask him” (Matt 7:11). Jesus makes an important statement about the human condition. Human tendencies would likely lead to the assumption that good parents give good gifts to their children. However, Jesus sees their state not as good but rather as those “who are evil” (Matt 7:11). There are no good parents because the very nature of all parents is evil.

Understanding a parent’s true nature is vital, and, as Morris points out, “We should not overlook the way being evil is slipped into the argument. Jesus brings forward no evidence but assumes this as so basic that it can be taken for granted, even when he is

¹⁷ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 680.

¹⁸ Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, 230.

¹⁹ Keener, *Matthew*, 161.

referring to a good action.”²⁰ The evil is also not merely connected to the activities of people “who are evil.” Rather, he affirms the biblical teaching that “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21). Jesus also does not say “we are evil” which would have included himself in that category. Instead, he clearly separates himself by saying “you.” Jesus is not the “you” but instead is the one “come down from heaven” (John 6:38) and “from the Father” (John 16:28).

While humans are marked by evil, Lloyd-Jones writes, “There is a very interesting negative addition. Because God is your Father He will never give you anything that is evil.”²¹ London pastor Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) had a similar understanding when he wrote, “He will give the good which we did not ask, and withhold the ill which we so unwisely requested.”²² Humanity possesses such limited knowledge that individuals cannot ever know all the ramifications of their requests. What may appear to be a good request may, in fact, lead to a multitude of problems. God, however, “knows everything” (1 John 3:20) and can make “all things work together for good” (Rom 8:28).

Christ reminds his followers that they can come to their heavenly Father, who desires to be sought by his children so he may bestow good gifts to them. R. T. France notes that this passage connects back to 6:25-34 “with the language about the Father in heaven who gives to his children (Matt 7:11), echoing Matthew 6:32-33 and thus returning us to one of the overriding themes of the whole discourse; the invitation to ‘seek’ (Mat 7:7-8) echoes the call to ‘seek first’ in Mat 6:33.”²³ The children of God who seek will find the one they seek.

²⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 171.

²¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 203.

²² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 80.

²³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 232.

The “how much more” analogy becomes apparent when comparing the gifts of parents who are evil with gifts from the perfect “Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:11).

Davies writes that this passage should

encourage the disciple who hesitates because of, or who is dismayed at the great weight of Jesus’ heavy imperatives. For the evangelist, then, the point is not persistent effort but the good character of the Father as this has been revealed by Jesus. Confirmation of this is to be had in the conclusion: what is emphasized in v. 11 is not human effort but God’s gift: “how much more will your Father who is in heaven.”²⁴

Christians receive good gifts not because they have asked enough or carried out a prescribed formula but because God is a good Father who gives good gifts to his children.

Matthew 7:7-11 demonstrated that the Father not only hears the prayers of his children but grants good gifts to them when they pray. The corresponding passage in Luke provides insight into how great a gift the Father has made available to Christians. Jesus says, “How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). Lloyd-Jones states that “in giving the Holy Spirit He gives us everything; every fitness we require, every grace, every gift. They are all given to us in Him.”²⁵

Paul’s Teaching How the Holy Spirit Helps Us Pray (Rom 8:26-27)

Before Jesus was taken to heaven, he promised to send the Holy Spirit as a helper (John 14:16-17). The promise was kept and attested to by the disciples who had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:33). Throughout the New Testament, the results of the work of the Holy Spirit are on display. The Spirit works to “convict the world concerning sin” (John 16:7-8), “gives life” to believers (Rom 8:10-11), and leads them “into all truth” (John 16:13-15). The Christian life must also be marked “by the

²⁴ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 679-80.

²⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 464.

sanctifying work of the Spirit” (1 Pet 1:2). Without the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, Christians would be alone in a world that hates them (John 15:19). Through prayer, Christians have access to the Father, who promises to give good gifts to those who ask; the greatest of these gifts is the Holy Spirit himself (Matt 7:7-11; Luke 11:13). Paul teaches in Romans 8:26-27 that the Holy Spirit is not only a gift but the helper in the very prayer of Christians.

The suffering and affliction of the human experience make the Spirit’s help in prayer all the more vital. The apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome to encourage them in the hope they have in the face of “the sufferings of this present time” (Rom 8:18). While Christians in Rome undoubtedly suffered in ways few in the modern developed world have to face, the sufferings of this time are no less real. Death, disease, and suffering are constant companions even in the contemporary world. In the face of these afflictions, Paul points to the “hope for what we do not see” to help get believers through difficult times (Rom 8:25).

In the same way that hope sustains believers, the Spirit sustains believers because the “Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). Douglas Moo writes that “the Spirit joins with us in bearing the burdens imposed by our ‘weakness.’”²⁶ What weakness the Spirit is helping with has been the source of some debate. Paul uses the same word for weakness or ailment (*ἀσθένεια*) when referring to physical needs, such as using wine for the stomach (1 Tim 5:23) and his bodily ailments (Gal 4:13). However, weakness or infirmity is not limited to just the person’s physical frailness. Paul also uses *weakness* (*ἀσθένεια*) to describe the weakness of the flesh regarding temptation and sin (Rom 6:19). The author of Hebrews writes that Christ, as the great high priest, is able to sympathize with our weakness (*ἀσθένεια*) because he “has been tempted as we are” (Heb 4:15).

²⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 523.

The Holy Spirit's help is necessary because sin has caused both physical and spiritual weakness. John Murray noted that "'infirmity' is a comprehensive term in itself and can cover the whole range of the weakness which characterizes us in this life."²⁷ Not only does infirmity characterize Christian life, but it must also be recognized and accepted. Leon Morris made an important point when he stated, "We should notice further that Paul does not say that the Spirit removes our weakness; it is still there, and we live our whole life in conditions of weakness."²⁸ God tells the prophet Isaiah that he is looking for the humble and contrite in spirit (Isa 57:15; 66:2). *Contrite* conveys the idea of someone who is crushed or broken. Those who are contrite before God recognize their spiritual bankruptcy and, as a result, are blessed because "blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt 5:3). This individual would have nowhere else to turn but to God through the help of the Holy Spirit.

While the condition of weakness is undoubtedly part of what Paul is trying to communicate, more may be intended. Thomas Schreiner writes, "The text suggests that the weakness is more specific. . . . Paul is not describing, then, the Spirit's help for us in a general way, nor does he contemplate weakness as a total phenomenon in the lives of believers. It is weakness in prayer that Paul zeroes in on, and the Spirit's help in prayer is the answer to our weakness."²⁹

Even those who support the condition of weakness in a more general sense end up with a similar result. Moo sees the weakness as general, but also see that prayer is a specific area where we need help since "the wording of the clause indicates that it is not the manner, or style, of prayer that Paul has in view but the content, or object, of prayer -

²⁷ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 311.

²⁸ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 326, Accordance Bible Software.

²⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 442-43.

what we are to pray for.”³⁰ Christians do not need help understanding whether they should stand or kneel in prayer. A Christian’s life can be complicated to the point that “we do not know what to pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26), which then necessitates the need for help. John MacArthur provided a key reason for why Christians need help when he stated, “Because of our imperfect perspectives, finite minds, human frailties, and spiritual limitations, we are not able to pray in absolute consistency with God’s will. Many times we are not even aware that spiritual needs exist.”³¹ Human limitation means that there is no way to know that what they are praying for is best for many situations.

The finite human mind cannot possibly understand the complexities of one’s own life, much less the lives of all those around them. Charles Hodge noted that the inability to know all the outcomes caused heathen philosophers to reason that men “ought not to pray.”³² With limited knowledge, prayers may be dangerous since there is no way to know all of a prayer’s ramifications. What may at first appear to be undesirable and something no one would pray for may ultimately be what is best.

With so many frailties inherent in believers’ lives, the “Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom 8:26). James Rosscup notes that “this is the only reference to the Spirit of God interceding by prayer, whether in the OT, Jewish apocryphal or pseudepigraphical books, rabbinic writings, Qumran literature, or any known source up to Paul’s words in Romans 8.”³³ The Christian then has two intercessors within the Triune Godhead. The first is Christ in heaven, who intercedes on the Christian’s behalf before God (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 1 John 2:1). Second, the believer has the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:17) who is also interceding on his behalf. Paul’s

³⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 523.

³¹ John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 466.

³² Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 278.

³³ James E. Rosscup, “The Spirit’s Intercession,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, no. 1 (1999): 139.

statement that the Spirit intercedes with “groanings too deep for words” has been interpreted in several ways. Moo commented that the charismatic movement had taken this as glossolalia, which is “speaking in tongues” or a “Spirit inspired prayer language.”³⁴ The challenge to this is two-fold; first, the Spirit’s intercession appears to be for every believer, based on the passage. While Paul makes a case for every believer speaking in tongues (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1), he also indicates that not all believers do (1 Cor 12:30).³⁵

The second challenge relates to “too deep for words” (ἀλάλητος) which Moo asserts is probably best viewed as “unspoken” groans.³⁶ MacArthur takes “too deep for words” a step further when he writes, “As Paul says explicitly, the groans are not even audible and are inexpressible in words. Yet those groans carry profound content, namely divine appeals for the spiritual welfare of each believer. In a way infinitely beyond our understanding, these groanings represent what might be called intertrinitarian communication, divine articulations by the Holy Spirit to the Father.”³⁷ The groans are communicated directly to God and are unheard, so they cannot be intended for other believers.

The next question to be addressed pertains to who is doing the groaning. Is the Christian groaning with the Spirit’s help, or is the Spirit alone groaning on behalf of Christians? The assertion that the groans are the Spirit’s alone is seen in Moo’s statement: “while we cannot, then, be absolutely sure (and we have no clear biblical parallels to go by), it is preferable to understand these ‘groans’ as the Spirit’s own ‘language of prayer,’

³⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 525.

³⁵ The author is taking a noncharismatic approach and due to the limitation of this project cannot cover this topic in depth. For additional information see Richard B. Gaffin and Wayne A. Grudem, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1996) or Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2018).

³⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 525.

³⁷ MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, 467.

a ministry of intercession that takes place in our hearts (cf. v. 27) in a manner imperceptible to us.”³⁸

There is nothing that would prevent the Spirit from groaning on behalf of Christians without their involvement. The question is whether that is the best understanding of this passage. Paul uses “groan” in two places outside of this passage. The first groan refers to creation, and the second refers to Christians’ groanings in this life (Rom 8:22-23; 2 Cor 5:2, 4). Considering the use of the word *groan* in Romans 8:22-23, the groanings would appear to be the result of physical and spiritual weakness in the Christian. Moo’s assertion that it is the Spirit alone who groans is countered by Schreiner, who wrote, “It seems more likely to me that the groanings are genuinely those of believers that originate from the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ The Holy Spirit intercedes through the groans of Christians longing for the time when Christ will “make all things new” (Rev 21:5).

Hodge summarizes the Spirit’s work in prayer with “all true prayer is due to the influence of the Spirit who not only guides us in the selection of the objects for which to pray but also gives us the appropriate desires, and works within us that faith without which our prayers are of no avail.”⁴⁰ The intercession of the Spirit is answered because “he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27). The Spirit is not searching the heart; it is God the Father who searches the heart (1 Chr 28:9; Pss 7:9; 139:1, 23; Jer 17:10). God the Father hears the believer’s groans and answers “because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:27). The Spirit’s intercessory prayers are always answered since they are always in accordance with the will of God.

³⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 525.

³⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 6:446.

⁴⁰ Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans*, 279.

MacArthur points out that while Paul's statement concerning the will of the Father and the Spirit may appear unnecessary, believers should be encouraged by it since "the Father understands exactly what the Spirit is thinking because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Because the Spirit's will and the Father's will are identical, and because God is one."⁴¹ The unutterable groanings of the Christian are heard by God because the groans originate with the Spirit whose will is always entirely in line with God the Father. John Calvin wrote, "Since experience shows us that unless we are supported by the hand of God, we are soon oppressed by innumerable evils, Paul admonishes us that, though we are weak in every part and various infirmities threaten our fall, there is sufficient protection in the Spirit of God to prevent us from ever being destroyed or being overwhelmed by any accumulation of evils."⁴²

Rosscup writes that in Romans 8:26-27, Paul shows "prayer as a strategic activity, introducing communion with God in the very heart of the epistle."⁴³ Christians can be encouraged in prayer as a strategic activity even when they "have tribulation" (John 16:33) and their flesh is at war with the very Spirit sent to help them (1 Pet 2:11). The heart's deep cries are not to be stifled or held back, but through the Spirit, they are shaped into a prayer that pierces to the very throne room of heaven. Such prayers have immense power since they are not just wishful requests but requests shaped and formed by the Spirit in accord with the will of God.

⁴¹ MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, 469.

⁴² John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1960), 177.

⁴³ Rosscup, "The Spirit's Intercession," 139.

Paul's Teaching on Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom and to Know the Will of God (Col 1:9-11)

Paul, when writing “to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae” (Col 1:2), prays for them in response to the good report he received from Epaphras (Col 1:6-7). In looking at Paul’s prayer, it is important to note what he is praying for on their behalf. Paul is asking that the Christians in Colossae may know God. Calvin notes, “He indirectly intimates, that something is still wanting in them, that he may prepare the way for imparting instruction to them, and may secure their attention to a fuller statement of doctrine.”⁴⁴ Paul, in Colossians 1:9-11, does not instruct the church to study so that they may find what is needed; instead, he prays that they may receive what is needed.

Paul’s opening statement of ceaseless prayer is not a unique. When Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, he instructed them to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17). Perseverance in his prayers and encouragement to others in their prayers is a common theme throughout Paul’s writings (Eph 1:16; Col 4:2; Phil 1:4; 2 Thess 1:11; 2 Tim 1:3). Scot McKnight points out that “some observant Jews prayed three times per day. Paul did not cease being a Jew in practice when he encountered the risen Jesus and came to the conviction that Jesus was the Messiah. He simply reoriented his existing Jewish practices in a messianic, Spirit-shaped, and ecclesial-rooted manner.”⁴⁵

The Spirit-shaped prayer of Paul for the Christians in Colossae takes two forms: “praying” and “asking.” Praying and asking recall Christ’s teaching in Matthew 7:7-11 on persistence in prayer. Richard R. Melick makes a similar connection noting that

The specific nature of the prayer occurs in two complementary verbs found here, “praying” (*proseuchomenoi*) and “asking” (*aitoumenoi*).²⁴ Although the terms are basically synonymous, when used together they stress slightly different aspects of prayer. The first, “praying,” is a general term, the most common for prayer in the

⁴⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), comm. Colossians 1:9, Accordance Bible Software.

⁴⁵ Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2018), 108.

Pauline Epistles. It covers the entirety of the prayer life. The second, “asking,” is more specific. It expresses a particular request that God intervene in the lives of the people for whom Paul prayed.⁴⁶

Paul, out of concern for the church’s growth, is persistent in his prayers so “that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28b).

For the church to grow to maturity, Paul prays “that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1:9b).

Understanding the source of this wisdom is essential because, as Calvin points out, “So long as men are regulated by their own carnal perceptions, they have also their own wisdom, but it is of such a nature as is mere vanity, however much they may delight themselves in it.”⁴⁷ This section of verse nine has been translated as “in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (RSV/NRSV, NIV), or “with all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives” (GNB).

Moo points out that knowledge and “the language of ‘fulfill’ or ‘fullness’” occurs at some crucial junctures in Colossians (1:19; 2:9-10), leading some to suggest that the language may have played a role in the false teaching.⁴⁸ Melick makes a similar assertion about knowledge when he writes,

Generally in the New Testament. . . the word has a religious use. It was also a favorite word of the Gnostic philosophers/religionists. It was, for them, the way of enlightenment that bridged the gap between the visible, material, evil world, and the invisible, spiritual, and (often) good world of reality. The battle between good and evil took place in the spiritual world; for the Gnostics, the visible world was influenced, even controlled, by spirit beings which they called “aeons.” Human beings, being material and evil, could only hope for salvation by a flash of insight (of knowledge, *gnōsis*) which would lift them above worldly matters.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 194.

⁴⁷ Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, comm. Colossians 1:9.

⁴⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 92.

⁴⁹ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 194.

Speculative and theoretical knowledge required no action, whereas comprehensive knowledge required a change in life. Theoretical knowledge, especially hidden or secret knowledge, has great human appeal.

John Stott wrote that “such an appeal has perennial fascination, offering as it does a special understanding of spiritual realities, immune from dissent or discussion, shared only by those similarly ‘in the secret.’”⁵⁰ To counter such ideas, Paul makes his case against such a view of knowledge since it only “puffs up” (1 Cor 8:1). Stott continues that “this kind of apostolic teaching always runs the risk of seeming pedestrian. But in Paul’s gospel the goal is no mystic awe-inspiring apprehension of divine mysteries reserved for an elite. It is rather an intelligent grasp of what the will of God demands in daily living.”⁵¹

For many people, the search is not for the knowledge that leads to behavioral transformation but for theoretical knowledge in the hope of attaining happiness. This search seeks the will of God for a job, marriage, and finances, hoping that by aligning with God’s will, everything will work out. McKnight writes that “while the tendency of Christians today is discerning the specific will of God for one’s life, Paul’s letters see the will of God as the divine narrative of redemption from creation to the kingdom—indeed, to know the will of God is to know God (cf. 1:10)—hence this knowledge is charismatic, hermeneutical, eschatological, and practical.”⁵²

There should be an outworking of knowledge that affects the present life in practical ways and is not only spiritual. McKnight points out, “The idea is that sound thinking is to lead to sound living, and while this theory is often claimed, the connection between thought and behavior is not automatic. Many who know do not do, and many

⁵⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Colossians & Philemon*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 37.

⁵¹ Stott, *The Message of Colossians & Philemon*, 37.

⁵² McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 110.

who do, do not know.”⁵³ Paul makes the connection between wisdom and actions: “so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him” (Col 1:10a). For Paul, true knowledge must lead to a changed life, unlike the later gnostic teachings which separated the spiritual or “gnosis” (knowledge) from the material. The ultimate goal is not simply to know the will of God, as necessary as that is. Knowing God’s will must affect more than just the mind. Moo writes, “Echoing a consistent biblical theme, Paul indicates that the Colossians’ mental and attitudinal re-alignment is to produce behavioral transformation.”⁵⁴

The “spiritual wisdom and understanding” in verse nine leads the Christian to live a life pleasing to God so he will be “bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10b). Moo provides some helpful insights when he states,

In v. 6, the focus was on the extension of the gospel to many people; here, however, it is the intensive growth within each believer that is the focus. The clause has a chiasmic structure in Greek, with the two participles in the “center” surrounded by qualifying phrases. “Bearing fruit” is to manifest itself in “every kind of” (the force probably of *panti*; cf. NJB; REB) good work. And *growing* happens in some relationship to the “knowledge of God” (the preposition translated *in* by TNIV is *en*).⁵⁵

There is a connection between the knowledge received from God, which results in growth. Knowing plays a vital role; the more one knows God, the more one grows.

F. F. Bruce writes that “Christians render the spiritual service of obedient lives to the living and true God and to his Son Jesus Christ. Thus the fair fruit of good works would spring in greater abundance from the divine seed which had been sown in their hearts, and at the same time they would make ever increasing progress in the knowledge

⁵³ McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 115.

⁵⁴ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 94.

⁵⁵ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 96-97.

of God.”⁵⁶ As Christians grow in the knowledge of God and his kindness to them, they should then display that kindness to others. Moo writes, “Living a life worthy of the Lord is a high and difficult calling. In typical New Testament fashion, Paul reminds us that God gives what he demands. And the form of the participle (the present tense) suggests that God’s provision of strength is continuously available to his people.”⁵⁷ Paul’s teaching in this passage directly corresponds to what was discussed earlier regarding Christ’s teaching on God’s provision of “good gifts” to empower them to live out kingdom principles in Matthew 7:7-11, and the ultimate gift is the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:18).

Paul continues in his prayer: “may you be strengthened with all power—according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy” (Col 1:11). There is one crucial point that needs to be observed about power; not only does Paul pray for others to have power, but he claims to have experienced that power in his life and work as an apostle (Rom 1:16; 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4–5; 2 Cor 4:7; 12:9; 1 Thess 1:5). Paul is asking that others might experience the same power that has transformed his life and ministry.

The strength that Paul is praying for comes with power, not just any power but one like no other. Moo writes that “the *strengthening* comes *with all power*. The word ‘all’ (Greek *pas*) has a variety of nuances. Here it signifies a “marker of the highest degree:” ‘complete,’ ‘unlimited’ power. The word *power* is closely related to the word “strengthen” (*dynamis* and *dynamoō*, respectively): we might paraphrase ‘strengthened by God with the greatest strength imaginable.’⁵⁸ Paul not only states how great the power is but also makes clear the source of that power. The ability to “walk in a manner worthy

⁵⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 42, EBSCOhost.

⁵⁷ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 97.

⁵⁸ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 97.

of the Lord” (Col 1:10a) is not possible even for the strongest and most self-disciplined person. Prayer is the conduit to ask for divine and unlimited strength to live the Christian life.

One of the reasons for strength Bruce points out is that “such an endowment with divine power will enable them to stand firm in the face of trial and opposition and everything else that may come to test the quality of their faith.”⁵⁹ In a modern world obsessed with achieving happiness, “endurance and patience” are not desirable qualities. James Dunn writes that “both are included not so much because of their distinctive meanings but to reinforce the point that hope of heavenly glory in the future requires patience and endurance now (not least in the face of alternative religious claims) and that both the present patience and the future transformation are the outworking of the same glorious might.”⁶⁰ The believer presses on with divine strength to endure the hardships of life as he patiently awaits the return of Christ. Stott concludes this passage by stating that “the little phrase ‘with joy’ cannot be disconnected from the earlier part of verse 11, since joy under pressure and through trial is one of the marvels of God’s work in his people.”⁶¹ Joy does not come from self-serving actions or personal achievement but from obedience to Christ. Christians who follow in obedience know that Christ has given them all that they need, and even in the hard times, there will be joy, since “these things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

⁵⁹ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 43.

⁶⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 74, Accordance Bible Software.

⁶¹ Stott, *The Message of Colossians & Philemon*, 40.

James's Instruction on Praying Right (Jas 1:6-8; 4:2-3)

Up to this point, the focus has been on the incredible reality not only that Christians are invited to ask in prayer but also that God will answer them. The passages on prayer that have been examined do not include parameters for prayer outside of asking for wisdom (Col 1:9). While prayer is encouraged, no explicit instructions are provided on what to ask or on the asker's motivations. On their own, these passages might lead to the conclusion that anything can be asked for and for any reason. The answer to how one could pray right is not simple, partly because Scripture is not a handbook or instruction manual. Yet, James 1:6-8 and 4:2-3 provide instruction on what is a right prayer that God will answer.

The Necessity of Faith in Asking (1:6-8)

The passage opens with “let him ask” (αἰτεῖτω), which MacArthur points out “translates an imperative verb in the Greek. James is not giving personal advice but a divine command, and therefore our calling on the Lord . . . is not an option.”⁶² Prayer is not an activity that Christians may or may not do based on needs or feelings. The statement “let him ask” is also found in the previous verse “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (Jas 1:5). The verse carries several similarities to Jesus's teaching on God's desires to give good gifts to those who ask (Matt 7:7-11). While verse six does speak specifically on asking for wisdom, Moo notes that James's “teaching here finds parallels to other NT text about prayer in general. So we are probably justified in taking his teaching in these verses to apply to any prayer.”⁶³

⁶² John MacArthur, *James, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 36.

⁶³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 60.

James continues with “faith” being a condition for answered prayer. Craig Bloomberg states that “here ‘faith’ refers not to initial belief, but to a continuing confidence in the identity and nature of our God.”⁶⁴ Faith as a condition for all prayer is also supported by Jesus’s statement, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Matt 21:21-22). Jesus says that whatever believers ask for in faith, they will receive.

Faith in prayer means that it is “with no doubting.” Dan McCartney explains that “this could be understood to mean that it is up to believers to convince themselves that God will give them what they ask for and somehow to expunge all traces of uncertainty from their minds. But this kind of self-hypnosis is not what James is getting at here.”⁶⁵ Christians will always struggle at times with doubt. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 when he writes that “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3). However, Abraham laughed when God told him that he would have a child by his ninety-year-old wife, Sarai (Gen 17:16-17). Twice, Sarai ends up in a harem because Abraham, out of fear, misleads local rulers by telling them that Sarai is his sister and not his wife (Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18). Abraham was a man of faith; however, that did not mean he was free from doubt.

Faith is not the complete absence of doubt but the overall pattern of one’s life and understanding of who God is. McCartney writes that

the word here translated “doubt” is specialized Christian meaning. The NT use of the verb διακρίνω in the middle or passive voice to mean something like “to doubt” is reasonably well attested (see Matt 21:21; Acts 10:20; Rom 4:20), but in ordinary Greek the word means “to distinguish, separate, divide. In fact, it has this meaning

⁶⁴ Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 52.

⁶⁵ Dan McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 90.

in James 2:4. The special meaning of the word in the NT probably developed because “doubt” is a form of passing judgment on God’s word and is therefore the opposite of faith. . . . A divided loyalty or an indecision or hesitancy that questions the integrity of God.⁶⁶

Faith looks to who God is and the truths that he has revealed; doubt questions whether God is who he says he is and whether he will do what he has said he will do.

God’s “eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived” (Rom 1:20), and through Scripture: he has given “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). Puritan preacher Thomas Manton (1620–1677) writes of the definite promise found in Scripture: “Doubt can arise from a suspicion that this is not the word or will of God, which is atheism; or from thinking that God will not make good his word, which is blasphemy; or from fear that he is not able to accomplish his will, which is unbelief.”⁶⁷ This individual is not having simple doubts as to whether the prayer is in God’s will. Rather, he is questioning the nature and character of God and is “like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6b).

Moo writes that “the picture here is not of a wave mounting in height and crashing to shore, but of the swell of the sea, never having the same texture and shape from moment to moment, but always changing with the variations in wind direction and strength.”⁶⁸ Paul uses a similar illustration to describe people influenced by every new kind of doctrine and human scheme (Eph 4:14). Such people, James says, should not expect to have their prayers answered (Jas 1:7).

One who lacks faith will not have his prayers answered because he is a “double-minded man” (Jas 1:8). Peter Davids notes, “That person is ἀνὴρ δίψυχος, a two-souled man . . . his divided mind, when it comes to trusting God, indicates a basic

⁶⁶ McCartney, *James*, 91.

⁶⁷ Thomas Manton, *An Exposition of the Epistle of James* (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2006) comm. on James 1:6, Accordance Bible Software.

⁶⁸ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 61.

disloyalty toward God.”⁶⁹ The double-minded man wants God but is also still bound to the things of the world. The person is in turmoil because of the tension within.

McCartney states that “those who are doubleminded are morally incapacitated and have difficulty discerning a wise path when they see it. They are unstable because they are unsteady, unable to stay the course (the Greek word *ἀκατάστατος*, implies unsettledness or fickleness).”⁷⁰ Lack of faith causes the doubleminded to be unstable in all areas of their lives.

The author of Hebrews writes, “Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb 11:6). Answered prayer comes when Christians believe God exists, that they should seek him, and that he provides good gifts to those who seek him.

The Necessity of Right Motives in Asking (4:2-3)

Passion has a powerful influence on all aspects and actions of human life. James points out in 4:2 that desires and coveting fueled by passions have led individuals to murder, fight, and quarrel. Kurt Richardson notes that “whereas envy is willing to destroy in order to gain what belongs to another, coveting is willing to steal what is not one’s own. Coveting is willingness to turn an earthly object of human desire into something of ultimate concern.”⁷¹ Rather than turn to God in prayer, these individuals have turned on each other in an attempt to gain what they lack. Richardson writes that “Desire-filled, envious believers do not make requests of God (cf. Phil 4:6) but instead are driven by their self-sufficiency and shame, self-sufficiency in that they do not really

⁶⁹ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 74-75.

⁷⁰ McCartney, *James*, 92.

⁷¹ Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, The New American Commentary vol. 36 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 176.

trust in God for his provision (cf. the doubter of 1:6) and shame in that they do not correct themselves once they become aware of how bad their attitudes really are.”⁷²

Blomberg points out that “James reminds them, they need to *ask* in order to receive! Moreover, the present tense of the verb may suggest that at times they must ask continuously or persistently.”⁷³ Asking continuously once again is part of seeking God in prayer. God knows what is needed before they even ask (Isa 65:24). However, in his sovereignty, God has made it so that some things must be asked for or they will not be received. However, there appears to have been those who were praying since James says, “You ask and do not receive” (Jas 4:3a). MacArthur notes that “*αἰτέω* (ask) is the same verb used in 1:5-6 and carries the idea of pleading, begging, imploring.”⁷⁴ Individuals are asking because as McKnight notes, “James assumes that they are in fact praying to God and bringing their petitions before him, but, instead of getting what they want (4:2c), they do not get what they want.”⁷⁵

Blomberg provides valuable insight into why the prayer is going unanswered. “Here the issue involves evil motives—asking ‘wrongly’ (*κακῶς*). James makes another interesting switch in voice from active (*αἰτεῖτε*) to middle (*αἰτεῖσθε*), possibly in order to draw out the selfishness involved in their requests. They do not pray altruistically, but rather pray emphatically (intensively) but wrongly for their own wants and desires.”⁷⁶ Davids expands on the thought when he writes, “Such prayers cannot lessen frustrated evil desire. No ‘spiritual benefit’ is found under such psychological conditions from prayer. The imperative of prayer (1:5), of asking God for his provision, requires the prior

⁷² Richardson, *James*, 176.

⁷³ Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 189.

⁷⁴ MacArthur, *James*, 190.

⁷⁵ Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 329.

⁷⁶ Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 189.

knowledge of our true need. But the kind of asking practiced by some of James's addressees is futile because it asks only on selfish and envious terms."⁷⁷

Individuals who do not "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1b) should not expect to have their prayers answered. James has made it clear that unanswered prayer is the result of one of three things. Prayers go unanswered because of doubt (1:6-8), not asking (4:2), or by asking with wrong motives (4:3). Richardson states, "The evil motives from which some have dared to shape their requests have their source, again, in evil desire, that is, their 'pleasures' (v. 1). In such prayers God is regarded as a mere dispensary of instruments of vice."⁷⁸ Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal 6:7-8).

Conclusion

The biblical call to come to God and ask of him in prayer is found throughout Scripture. The need for prayer does not lessen as time goes by. Christians continue to need help to live out a life pleasing to God. Manton writes,

This supposition is universal. God's wisdom allows creatures to lack, because dependence brings awareness. If we were not forced to live in continued dependence on God, we would not bother with him. We see this—the less people are aware of their condition, the less religious they are. Promises usually appeal to those who are in need, because they are most likely to take note of them: see Isaiah 55:1, Matthew 11:28, and Matthew 5:3 and 6. Those who are humbled by their own needs are most open to God's offers. Only God is self-sufficient; creatures have needs, so that their eyes are fixed on God. Certainly they lack most who lack nothing.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 159.

⁷⁸ Richardson, *James*, 177.

⁷⁹ Manton, *An Exposition of the Epistle of James*, comm. on James 1:5.

Christians who see little need to seek God in prayer are most in danger. Such individuals are at risk as seen in Christ's warning, "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17).

Matthew 7:7-11 shows Jesus's teaching that not only are Christians to seek the Father in prayer but that he desires to give gifts far superior to that of mere earthly fathers. Romans 8:26-27 teaches how the Holy Spirit helps believers in prayer even when they have no words. Colossians 1:9-11 demonstrates the need for wisdom that is acquired only through prayer. James 1:6-8 and 4:2-3 provide instruction on praying right so that the believer's prayers may be answered. Each of these passages demonstrates the great need for prayer in a Christian's life and how Scripture provides a theological basis for developing a culture of prayer. Chapter 3 examines how church history offers further support for creating a culture of prayer within the church.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO CREATING A
CULTURE OF PRAYER

Prayer is vitally important for the individual Christian as well as the local church. Jesus, when teaching his disciples, had a clear expectation of prayer when he repeated the statement “when you pray” (Matt 6:5-7) three times. Prayer is a regular part of most church activities, and Sunday-morning worship services usually contain one or more prayers. A 2019 study by Lifeway Research affirmed the normative nature of prayer.¹ The study found that around three-quarters (78 percent) of American Protestants conduct what is described as spur-of-the-moment prayers throughout the day. However, only 2 in 5 (38 percent) have private prayer time during the day. Christian Smith noted that youth struggle even more since “many religious teens in the United States appear to engage in few religious practices.”² This chapter will deal with the theoretical, practical, and historical basis for prayer by first looking at the modern church to provide a background for some of the issues the church faces regarding prayer. Then the chapter will then look at Paul and the early church fathers, as well as the reformers and Puritans, for help rediscovering the necessity of fervent and unceasing prayer for present needs and trials.

¹ Aaron Earls, “Most Churchgoers Say They Spend Their Day Seeking God,” Lifeway Research, August 15, 2019, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/08/15/most-churchgoers-say-they-spend-their-day-seeking-god/>.

² Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 269.

State of Prayer in the Twenty-First Century Western Church

Christians in western churches have access to countless books and other resources on prayer, and the topic of prayer is read and talked about regularly. Unfortunately, there appears to have been a change in the church's view of prayer over the last century, leading to a change in the practice of prayer for many people compared to other times in church history. Ronald Smith writes that "the vast mass of even conscientious church members have entirely relinquished the habit of private prayer in any of the conventional forms."³ Without private prayer, there is no "go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Matt 6:6b). The change has meant not only that people struggle to pray, but as Paul Miller writes, "American culture is probably the hardest place in the world to learn to pray."⁴

Blaming secular culture's influence on the church is the easy answer. While culture may undoubtedly play a part, it may not wholly explain what has caused many churchgoers to neglect private prayer. A. W. Tozer points to a specific cause for the lack of private prayer in Western churches. He writes,

The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. . . . With our loss of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine Presence. We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence.⁵

Private prayer loses its importance when God is viewed as smaller than he really is, or humanity views itself as better off than it really is.

Modern science and philosophy have crept into the mindset of many people in the church, affecting their desire to pray. Friedrich Heiler notes that "Even the great theologians who as thinkers wrestled with the problem of prayer and only too often (one

³ Ronald Gregor Smith, *Secular Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 207.

⁴ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2017), 3.

⁵ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperOne, 1978), 1.

thinks of Schleiermacher) surrendered to an intellectualistic and anti-supernatural metaphysic. . . . Rational philosophical thought means the disintegration and dissolution of prayer.”⁶ Could it be that some Christians who unknowingly looked into the deep well of biblical history fell into the same trap as those who looked for a historical Jesus? What they saw at the bottom of the well was a God who looked like them.⁷ A God who looks like you is no God at all and certainly not one worthy of worship.

Prayer that does not seek to “meet God in adoring silence,” as Tozer states, may then become focused on base human needs. Heiler writes that the primitive “praying man does not obey a native inner impulse, but the external compulsion of the law; fear of punishment affrights him, hope of reward allures him.”⁸ Prayers then become focused on protection and provisions and based on fear or gain. People pray because they fear going without and because they desire something they do not have. Without even realizing it, some Christians are praying as did the primitives of ages past.

Iain Murray noted that a theological shift occurred during the Second Great Awakening so that “even prayer ceased to be thought of primarily as worship and became rather the best means for the fulfillment of human needs.”⁹ Prayer morphed from worship of the almighty God to a means of gaining things. God is not sought because of who he is but rather for what he can do.

Many people seek God not only for material help but also for an emotional boost. Donald Bloesch writes that “in popular folk piety, prayer is often understood as a form of self-therapy, as a technique to attain self-identity or self-fulfillment. It is commonly held that the true answer to prayer does not come from an outside power but

⁶ Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion*, ed. Samuel McComb and John Edgar Park (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 102.

⁷ George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London: Longmans, 1910), 44.

⁸ Heiler, *Prayer*, 351.

⁹ Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 381.

resides in the act itself.”¹⁰ This understanding of prayer as self-therapy has become common among Americans and has been described as a component of “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”¹¹ Prayer is a means of self-help or self-care that leads to people feeling better about themselves.

In a similar vein, some Christians pray, believing that prayer only changes them and not the situation. God does not interfere directly in human life, but through prayer, the person can change, which means how the person views the situation changes. Bloesch notes that those who argue “that prayer does not change things but changes people who change things tends to naturalize prayer by making it confirm what is explicable in human terms. The idea of a God who decisively intervenes in the affairs of humankind in direct answer to prayer fades into the background.”¹² God has become distant and inaccessible. For some individuals, God is distant, and they are unsure of how to draw near, while others are happy to keep God at a distance so they can live as they please. Such an understanding puts God at a distance and is not in line with biblical Christianity.

The modern challenges of prayer mean that simple encouragement to pray is insufficient. Christians must be taught what to pray, how to pray, and to whom they pray. Only then will people begin to rediscover what prayer is. Heiler writes that in prayer, one “speaks as a child to his parents. In perfect candor he expresses himself frankly, he ‘pours out his heart’ in simple confidence God is no stranger, he knows Him well; with unaffected sincerity he loves Him because he has often experienced His goodness; with

¹⁰ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Struggle of Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 14.

¹¹ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162. Two of the five markers of “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” are (1,) the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself and (2,) God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.

¹² Bloesch, *The Struggle of Prayer*, 17.

heartfelt confidence he trusts in Him, he relies on His power and kindness.”¹³ In prayer, the believer goes before their heavenly Father, who loves them and works everything for their good (Rom 8:28).

Rediscovering Prayer

Rediscovering prayer is vital to not only individual Christians and their daily walks, but for the church as a whole. Eric Alexander writes, “In the Christian church over the years, we have turned the truth upside down, and commonly speak of ‘praying for the work’—the implication being that prayer is an additional ingredient to our Christian service. The truth is that prayer is the real work, and apart from it all other work is in vain. The reason for that is quite simple. It is that essentially this work in which we are engaged is God’s work, not man’s.”¹⁴ Prayer is the lifeline to the sole source of help for Christians as they seek to live out the commands of Christ.

Unfortunately, prayer for many Christians appears to provide little help and may create more questions than answers. Timothy Keller notes that “we are so used to being empty that we do not recognize the emptiness as such until we start to try to pray. We don’t feel it until we begin to read what the Bible and others have said about the greatness and promise of prayer.”¹⁵ Coming face to face with spiritual emptiness often causes Christians to struggle in prayer. Pastor and author E. M. Bounds (1835-1913) makes a similar point when he writes “a lack of ardor in prayer, is the sure sign of a lack of depth and of intensity of desire; and the absence of intense desire is a sure sign of God’s absence from the heart!”¹⁶

¹³ Heiler, *Prayer*, 63.

¹⁴ Eric J. Alexander, *Prayer: A Biblical Perspective* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 40.

¹⁵ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, Penguin Group USA, 2014), 24.

¹⁶ Edward M. Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer: Experience the Wonders of God through Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 31.

Christian prayer is a struggle because people often lose sight of two separate but related issues. Those issues are the true nature of the heart and the true nature of the one to whom they are praying. Without a proper understanding of the human condition, there is a struggle to see a need for prayer. One must understand the state of the human heart. J. I. Packer states that “in the consistent Bible view the heart is nothing less than the taproot of the self, the deep source of our character and purposes, of our attitudes and responses, of our self-image and the self-projection, in short, of the total human being that each of us is.”¹⁷ The heart is at the core of the person and affects everything. Having the right view of self is one of two necessary steps for recovering private prayer. In private prayer, understanding the individual’s state and its needs requires three points to be addressed.

First, it must be understood that Christlikeness and not personal happiness is the goal. Bloesch notes that “The often painful and laborious struggle to attain spiritual maturity in Christ that characterized the great saints of the past (both Catholic and Protestant) is singularly absent from the current fascination with spirituality.”¹⁸ Many Christians are happy to be spiritual, but few want to take up their cross and follow Christ (Matt 16:24). Without a striving for spiritual maturity, there is an absence of prayer on spiritual matters.

The second struggle is with one’s self, either through self-sufficiency or self-justification. Individuals who believe that they can gain favor with God through innate goodness or what they have done are self-justified. Miller writes that self-sufficiency reveals itself in the idea that “if you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life. You’ll always be a little too tired, a little

¹⁷ J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 38.

¹⁸ Bloesch, *The Struggle of Prayer*, 11.

too busy.”¹⁹ In both instances, the person believes that they do not need help from God.

Karl Barth (1886-1968) counters the idea that individuals can do it on their own when he states, “The man who really prays never attempts to justify himself. In true prayer, he knows that he cannot do so.”²⁰ True Christian prayer knows that the self is a hindrance and not a help. Knowing that nothing within the Christian can raise them up in the sight of God leads one to pray to the only One who can help.

In contrast, Miller notes that “less mature Christians have little need to pray.... They are barely aware of their impatience. Instead, they are frustrated by all the slow people they keep running into. Less mature Christians are quick to give advice. There is no complexity to their worlds because the answers are simple—‘just do what I say, and your life will be easier.’” There is no sense of absolute dependence on God because they do not see the magnitude of their sin and how great is their need.

The third struggle is that private prayer comes from understanding what is really needed and where help comes from. Bloesch notes, “Christian prayer is born out of the realization that human beings in and of themselves are incapable of saving themselves from the forces of darkness within and about them.”²¹ The darkness is certainly not only all around like a lion looking to devour (1 Pet 5:8), but also in our flesh which is at war with the Spirit (Gal 5:17). Heiler makes a similar statement that “humility and fear fill him who prays. He is penetrated with the greatness and power of the Lord, crushed with a feeling of absolute dependence.”²²

Not only must people have a correct view of themselves and their complete and utter dependence on God, but they must also have a proper view of God. If there is a

¹⁹ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 37.

²⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God, Volume 2, Part 2: The Election of God; The Command of God*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance and Geoffrey William Bromiley, (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 752.

²¹ Bloesch, *The Struggle of Prayer*, 19.

²² Heiler, *Prayer*, 62.

wrong view of God, then there is also a struggle to see a reason to pray. Many people like to think of spiritual things, and it is a popular undertaking in this day and age. People trying to understand God may think about God and then come to conclusions as to what they think he is like. J. I. Packer writes about how

we hear people say, 'I like to think of God in such-and-such a way' Let it be said, loud and clear, that this 'I like' mindset guarantees that all concepts of God that we form by our speculation and wishful thinking will be seriously wrong. Sin, the anti-God syndrome in our mental, moral and spiritual system, ensures that this will be so.²³

Sin distorts all that a person thinks, even the ideas about who God is.²⁴

Packer, in his book on prayer, emphasizes eight truths about God. Two of them are especially noteworthy in their relation to the modern struggle with prayer. Number one is that God is a promise keeper. Packer writes, "The basis of all our asking in prayer, as of our trusting in God, is and must be knowing his promises, claiming them, relying on them and holding fast to them whatever happens, in confidence that they will always be kept."²⁵ Knowing the promises of Scripture is vital to the individual Christian's prayer life.

Knowing the promises of Scripture is not, however, the primary goal. Bounds writes, "'Have faith in God,' 'Trust in the Lord' form the keynote and foundation of prayer. Primarily, it is not trust in the Word of God, but rather trust in the person of God. For trust in the person of God must precede trust in the Word of God."²⁶ God, unlike humans, will keep his promises no matter what happens in life. Christians can trust Scripture because their ultimate faith and trust have been placed in God as the author.

The second truth is that God is praiseworthy. Packer notes that "God merits all

²³ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 21.

²⁴ For additional reading on the nature and attributes of God, see J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 20th anniv. ed. (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*; Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Attributes of God*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006).

²⁵ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 30.

²⁶ Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 25.

the adoration that we can give him, for the beauty, the goodness and the faithfulness that he shows us in so many different ways. . . . We praise him because of who and what he is.”²⁷ God is worthy of worship and praise not only because of what he has done but simply because of who he is. God is praised even for his judgments and punishing of the wicked (Rev 19:2).

Christians may know they need to pray to praise God for who he is and for what he has done. They also need to pray because they know God is a promise-keeping God. Miller notes that this can be challenging because “God wants us to come to him empty-handed, weary, and heavy-laden. Instinctively we want to get rid of our helplessness before we come to God.”²⁸ Approaching God in such a way is never easy, but it is necessary.

Looking to the necessity of prayer, Bounds reminds his readers that “what the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer.”²⁹ Modern Christians can learn much from looking back into church history and the lessons on prayer found there to become people of prayer. Paul and the early church fathers provide helpful lessons on prayer

Paul and the Early Church Fathers’ Views on Prayer

There is a natural tendency of the young to think that the old is outdated and unnecessary. Technology has made many people feel that progress has allowed modern

²⁷ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 31.

²⁸ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 42.

²⁹ Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 447.

man to leave the past behind. For Christians, however, the past contains immense amounts of practical help. The practical lessons from the past are beneficial in the area of prayer. Joel Beeke writes, “The giants of church history dwarf us in true prayer what most separates them from us is that prayer was their priority; they devoted considerable time and energy to it. They were prayerful men who knew how to take hold of God in prayer (Isa 64:7), being possessed by the Spirit of grace and supplication. They were Daniels in private and public prayer.”³⁰ From these giants in prayer come lessons that can help the modern church recapture the importance of prayer.

The historical practices of the Christian church, which call believers to pray, are rooted in the examples and teaching of Paul and the early church fathers. Paul’s letters provide a greater understanding of the gospel with its profound theology and practical advice. Alexander writes that with Paul, “So many of his epistles have the meat of the gospel sandwiched between an assurance that he prays without ceasing for those to whom he writes, and an appeal to them to pray for him.”³¹

While there is certainly an argument to be made that prayer was vital to all the apostles, it is from Paul’s letters that the church can glean a wealth of insights. Gerald Hawthorne writes that the apostle Paul’s “whole ministry was grounded in, and developed from, prayer. For Paul, the Christian experience was essentially (and unceasingly) an act of prayer.”³² Prayer was not an addition to the work but was integral to it. Prayer so marked Paul’s life and ministry that when he writes to Timothy to give him instruction, one of the first things he tells him is, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (1 Tim

³⁰ Joel R. Beeke and Brian G. Najapfour, eds., *Taking Hold of God: Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 224.

³¹ Alexander, *Prayer*, 44.

³² Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., “Prayer,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, The IVP Bible Dictionary Series 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 9, ProQuest Ebook Central.

2:1).

Christians can learn much about prayer from Paul because, as Bounds writes, “His epistles are the Word of God, inspired, authentic and of divine authority. So that prayer as taught by Paul is the doctrine which Almighty God would have his church accept, believe, and practice.”³³ The Spirit of God teaches prayer through the words of Paul found in Scripture.

Prayer and Scripture cannot be separated. Scripture drives prayer because it is the source of the knowledge of God and his promises. D. A. Carson states, “The more we learn about God and his ways and his perspectives, the more we improve our grasp not only of elemental theology but of prayer as well.”³⁴ The more one knows God; the more one learns to pray and pray right.

The examples set by Paul provide not only instruction on the need for prayer but also on how to pray. Throughout Paul’s epistles, a framework appears that can help develop a healthier prayer life. Carson writes that there is a framework made up of two parts in Paul’s mind when he prays.³⁵ The first part of the framework is that Paul is thankful for “signs of grace” like faith, love, and perseverance. Too often, thankfulness is forgotten in an age of instant gratification.

Ungratefulness is a significant problem, considering how much God has given the believer. All good gifts come from God (Jas 1:17), and for that reason, there is much to thank him for. Even in thankfulness, there can be problems as well. Carson notes, “The unvarnished truth is that what we most frequently give thanks for betrays what we most highly value.”³⁶ Thankfulness is an attitude to be nurtured, but one must always be aware

³³ Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 546.

³⁴ D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 76.

³⁵ Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 22-26.

³⁶ Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 23.

of the focus of thanksgiving. Thanking God for what we have but failing to thank him for things such as love, mercy, and faith can reveal a heart focused on earthly things.

Paul's framework of prayer was confidence in the believer's future glory. Carson writes that "the prospect of the Lord's return in glory, the anticipation of the wrap-up of the universe as we know it, the confidence that there will be a final and irrevocable division between the just and the unjust—these have become merely creedal points for us, instead of ultimate realities that even now are life-transforming."³⁷ In losing sight of the future glory, many people lay up earthly treasures that are destroyed rather than treasures in heaven (Matt 6:19-20). The human heart is where its treasures are (Matt 6:21). Prayer is a struggle when the heart is focused on something other than heavenly things. Paul's confidence in future glory should be a constant reminder of the need to place our hope in God while looking forward to Christ's return.

Paul's writing provides Christians a framework as well as a guide on how and what he prayed. Miller writes that "unceasing prayer is Paul's most frequent description of how he prayed and of how he wanted the church to pray."³⁸ Paul's life of unceasing prayer comes from his understanding of the life of Christ. Bounds states that "our intercession ought to catch by contagion, and by necessity the inspiration and largeness of Christ's great work at His Father's right hand. His business and His life are to pray. Our business and our lives ought to be to pray, and to *pray without ceasing*."³⁹ The Christian is not simply one who prays but one who makes prayer a priority throughout each day.

Prayer is needed because there is a constant need for help. Each day brings with it challenges that require assistance. Not only is help needed, but there are blessings available to be received only through prayer. Carson writes, "Many of the best of those

³⁷ Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 27.

³⁸ Miller, *A Praying Life*, 55.

³⁹ Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 178.

blessings we need again and again, and so we must constantly ask—like the child brought up in a home stamped with courtesy, where the means of obtaining things, even necessary things, is a respectful request.”⁴⁰ God’s mercies are new every morning (Lam 3:22-23), and it is for those mercies we pray and request and then give thanksgiving for things received.

Christians not only need to make prayer a priority, but they must also learn from Paul what to pray. Paul prayed for others’ salvation (Rom 10:1), for unity in the church (Rom 15:5), for peace (Rom 15:5), for comfort (2 Cor 1:4), that their love would grow (Phil 1:9), and that they would know Christ’s love (Eph 3:19), be sanctified (1 Thess 5:23), and live worthy of the call (2 Thess 1:11). This list is not exhaustive but provides a sample of what Paul prayed. Three other topics were essential subjects of his prayer.

The first subject is Paul’s request to have a greater knowledge of God (Eph 1:17). Paul saw an ongoing need to know God more. Alexander notes, “For most people, I think the ultimate reason for prayerlessness is a lack of desire for God.”⁴¹ Some may stop seeking God because they assume there is nothing more to learn. Others may have lost the desire to know more because knowing more places a greater requirement on their life. For Paul, his knowledge of God led him to ever greater praise of God (Rom 11:33).

While the Ephesians knew God, Albert Barnes notes that “Paul felt that they might make still higher; and the idea here is, that however far Christians may have advanced in knowledge and in love, there is an unfathomed depth of knowledge which they may still explore, and which they should be exhorted still to attempt to fathom.”⁴² Knowing more of God means knowing more of how great a treasure Christians have been

⁴⁰ Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 78.

⁴¹ Alexander, *Prayer*, 57.

⁴² Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, vol. 12, *Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949), 31.

given.

The second subject that stands out in Paul's prayer is that he is asking that those he is praying for might know or understand something of God's power. Having greater knowledge of God is not simply head knowledge. Keller states that "what Paul is talking about is the difference between having something be true of you in principle and fully appropriating it, using it, and living in it—in your 'inner being' (Eph 3:16) or 'in your heart' (v. 17)."⁴³ The power of God is needed to live a life that is pleasing to God. Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) preached on the need for power: "I now cry, 'Lord, let not the life thou hast given me ebb down till it becomes very feeble, but give me of thy Spirit that the life within me may become strong and mighty, and may subdue all the power of death within my members, that I may put forth the vigour and energy which come from thyself through the Spirit.'"⁴⁴ The power is necessary to deal with the fleshly desires that are constantly seeking to have their way in one's life. Mere knowledge leads to frustration since there is no power to implement those ideas.

The third subject that stands out in Paul's prayers is the request to know or understand the will or call of God (Col 1:9). Many people would like to know the will of God for their lives and spend time asking God whom they should marry or what house they should buy. Writing on Psalms 143:10, Carson notes that "to do the will of God in this passage is virtually synonymous with obeying what God has mandated. What God has mandated is his will; our responsibility is to do it. The psalmist does not here encourage us to find God's will, for he assumes it is already known."⁴⁵ The problem for many Christians is that they seek to know God's will in certain areas of their lives while ignoring many of the commands found in Scripture.

⁴³ Keller, *Prayer*, 167.

⁴⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Right Replies to Right Requests No. 959," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 621.

⁴⁵ Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 80.

Understanding the focus of Paul's prayers should lead Christians to consider what their prayers are focused on today. Most Christians can probably recall a church prayer time in which most of the prayers fall into one of three broad categories: finances, health, and relationships. None of the categories should be ignored, nor is it wrong to pray for them. In learning what to pray, Christians should consider how much Paul prayed for what they are praying for. Carson writes, "If the center of our praying is far removed from the center of Paul's praying, then even our very praying may serve as a wretched testimony to the remarkable success of the processes of paganization on our life and thought."⁴⁶ It is a wretched thing to realize that pagan ideas can influence one's prayers.

Learning from Paul not only teaches good theology and what one should pray, but it also helps counter the influences of a pagan culture on the Christian mind. Bounds wrote, "Paul's praying and his commands and the urgency with which he pressed upon the Church to pray, is the most convincing proof of the absolute necessity of prayer as a great moral force in the world, an indispensable and inalienable factor in the progress and spread of the Gospel, and in the development of personal piety."⁴⁷ The church and individual Christians must pray because they are dependent on God.

The lessons on prayer provided by Paul were carried on by the early church fathers. Unfortunately, not a lot is known about the practice of prayer in the early Christian Church. Paul Bradshaw notes that the "injunction in the *Didache* 8.3 to say the Lord's Prayer three times a day might be thought to suggest that the early Church kept to the three times of prayer observed in Rabbinic Judaism."⁴⁸ The New Testament provides

⁴⁶ Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 77.

⁴⁷ Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 545.

⁴⁸ Paul F. Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Divine Office* (London: SPCK, 1981), 26. The *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* is a disputed early Christian text.

no set times of prayer, so the early church may have continued the Rabbinic practice of daily prayer.

The lack of clear evidence for when to pray does not mean that there is no information on the practice of prayer in the early church. Bradshaw writes that based on the writings of the early church fathers, there are “good grounds for assigning an apostolic origin to the primary pattern of daily prayer.”⁴⁹ The question appears to be not about whether there was daily prayer but how frequently one prayed each day. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215) mentions that some Christians have set prayer times while others prayed throughout the day.⁵⁰

Not only was prayer a daily event, but early Christian writers affirmed Paul’s teaching on prayer. Ignatius (AD -108) wrote, “Pray ye without ceasing in behalf of other men.”⁵¹ The idea was not just to pray while going about daily tasks but to have times dedicated to prayer. Cyprian (AD 215-258) stated, “Let us therefore strike off and break away from sleep, and pray with urgency and watchfulness, as the Apostle Paul bids us.”⁵² Getting up and starting the day in prayer was part of being urgent in prayer.

In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the author reminds Christians that “prayer must be made to God without ceasing, and with unwavering confidence. . . . But if you grow weary and waver in your request, blame yourself, and not Him who does not give to

⁴⁹ Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church*, 59.

⁵⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* (or *Miscellanies*) 7.7, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, 5th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 534.

⁵¹ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 1.9, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, 5th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 53.

⁵² Cyprian, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 7.5, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 5, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, 5th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 286.

you.”⁵³ Christians often assume that since the prayer is unanswered, it must not be God’s will, rather than looking at themselves. Unanswered prayer may be an opportunity to do some introspection. Is there sin or doubt that may be hindering prayer? If there are biblical grounds for the prayer, pray without ceasing and with unwavering confidence that God answers prayer.

Sin is a constant struggle that should lead to prayer. Cyprian gives two important reasons to pray. The first reason is that daily prayer is needed because we stumble and fall each day; therefore, sanctification is needed each day.⁵⁴ Christians go to God in prayer, asking for the sanctifying work of the Spirit to have the strength to resist temptation and stand firm in the faith. Second, if Christ who was sinless prayed, “How much more ought we to watch nightly in constantly repeated prayer.”⁵⁵ While on this earth, Christians will always require help, and that help comes most readily through prayer.

While prayer provides help throughout the day, there are also times for dedicated prayer. Cyprian writes, “In His teaching the Lord has bidden us to pray in secret—in hidden and remote places, in our very bed-chambers—which is best suited to faith, that we may know that God is everywhere present, and hears and sees all, and in the plentitude of His majesty penetrates even into hidden and secret places.”⁵⁶ There is a need to have daily time or times when the Christian goes into a room, closes the door, and seeks God. The busyness of daily life is left outside so that God and God alone may be sought.

Thankfulness is also an important part of prayer, whether the believer is going

⁵³ Hermas, *The Pastor of Hermas* 2.2, (ANF, 2:26).

⁵⁴ Cyprian, *The Treaties of Cyprian* 4.12 (ANF, 5:450).

⁵⁵ Cyprian, *The Treaties of Cyprian* 4.29 (ANF, 5:455).

⁵⁶ Cyprian, *The Treaties of Cyprian* 4.4 (ANF, 5:448).

to God during the activities of life or when they go into their room to pray. The need for thankfulness in prayer is seen in the words of Clement: “giving thanks may praise, and praising thank the Alone Father and Son, Son and Father, the Son, Instructor and teacher, with the Holy Spirit, all in One, for whom is eternity, whose member we all are, whose glory the aeons are; for the All-good, All-lovely, All wise, All just One. To whom be glory both now and for ever.”⁵⁷ Thanksgiving came from knowing something of the person and work of God.

Paul and the early church fathers understood the need not only for prayer but to pray without ceasing with confidence in God who answers prayer. Tertullian (AD 155-220) writes that prayer is able to “transform the weak, to restore the sick, to purge the possessed, to open prison-bars, to loose the bonds of the innocent. . . . Prayer is the wall of faith: her arms and missiles against the foe who keeps watch over us on all sides. So never walk we unarmed.”⁵⁸ Humans are frail, jars of clay, but through prayer, there is access to a mighty fortress, and that mighty fortress is God.

The Reformers’ and Puritans’ Views on Prayer

The Reformers and the Puritans who followed have much to teach the church on the importance and necessity of prayer in the life of the Christian.⁵⁹ Men such as Luther and Calvin looked to Scripture alone for instruction on life and godliness. Through Scripture, they learned of their great need for God.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) may be best known for starting the Reformation, but he was also well known as a man of prayer. The Reformation changed not only the

⁵⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3.7 (ANF, 2:295).

⁵⁸ Tertullian, *Ethical* 3.29, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian: I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, 5th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 691.

⁵⁹ The medieval period was not covered in this project due to page limitations.

church but also how people prayed. The medieval Roman Catholic Church's practice of prayer had become unbiblical in many ways because of what the church's prayer books taught. Luther viewed the teachings in these prayer books to be "un-Christian foolishness."⁶⁰ The Protestant Church's rejection of indulgences and the sacrament of penance changed how many Christians dealt with sin.⁶¹ Prayer became urgent without indulgences and penance since God alone was the answer for dealing with sin. No longer could a Christian buy their way into heaven with the purchase of an indulgence since salvation was by grace alone.

Grace was a free gift of God available to those who asked, not something acquired from the Roman Catholic Church. To counter the Roman Catholic Church's teachings on prayer, Luther noted that "what is important for a good prayer is not many words, as Christ says in Matthew 6:7, but rather turning to God frequently and with heartfelt longing, and doing so without ceasing."⁶²

Luther felt that there were three things needed for salvation. First, the commandments enabled people to see their sickness. Second, the Creeds taught them where they might find healing. The third was to look to the Lord's Prayer because "the Lord's Prayer teaches how they may seek, get, and bring to themselves all this, namely, by proper, humble, consolatory prayer."⁶³ Without prayer, there was no access to the blessings made available to the believer.

The first petition of the Lord's prayer is often missed because it is taken as a statement and not a request. Luther writes that in prayer to God, our first request is to "grant us your devine grace that we might guard against all that does not serve to the

⁶⁰ Martin Luther, *Little Prayer Book, 1522, and A Simple Way to Pray, 1535*, ed. Mary Jane Haemig and Eric Lund, Annotated Luther Study ed. (Baltimore: Fortress Press, 2016), 165.

⁶¹ Everett Ferguson, *Church History*, vol. 2, *The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 112.

⁶² Luther, *Little Prayer Book*, 166.

⁶³ Luther, *Little Prayer Book*, 167.

honor and glory of your holy name.”⁶⁴ To claim the name of Christ and then live a life that fails to bring him glory is to break the second commandment and take the name of God in vain. Prayer makes the request for strength to live a life pleasing to God that brings Him glory.

There were also recommendations for when to pray, because prayer is vital to living a life pleasing to God. Luther states that “it is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Diligently guard against those false, deluding ideas, which tell you, ‘wait a little while.’”⁶⁵ The Christian prays each morning, asking for wisdom to know God’s will and the strength to do it, and all this comes through prayer.

Brian Najapfour writes of Luther, “When he prayed, he prayed as if God had already answered him. His prayer life also displayed how much he depended on the grace of God. He prayed to God because he knew that only God could help him.”⁶⁶ Luther understood that his life and everything he did depended on God. The impact of Luther’s work continues to this day, and none of it would have been possible apart from prayer.

While Luther may be best known for nailing his Ninety-five Theses to the church door, the act that helped begin the Reformation, John Calvin (1509-1564) is best known for his theological writings. Five hundred years after his death, Calvin’s writings are still widely regarded as some of the great works of Christian theology. Joel Beeke notes that although Calvin was known as a theologian, the focus of his writings on prayer was practical in nature. Beeke notes, “Calvin focuses more on the practice of prayer than on its doctrine, which shows how practical his theology is. For Calvin, prayer is the

⁶⁴ Luther, *Little Prayer Book*, 185.

⁶⁵ Luther, *Little Prayer Book*, 257.

⁶⁶ Beeke and Najapfour, *Taking Hold of God*, 26.

essence of the Christian life; it is a precious gift, not an academic problem.”⁶⁷ Calvin wrote on prayer not as an intellectual mountain to climb but as a practical matter to be practiced.

For many who understand Calvin’s theology, the question may be asked, “why pray?” John Hesselink writes that, “Especially given the fundamental tenets of Calvin’s theology, it is not an unreasonable question. That is, if God knows our needs before we ask him, what is the point of prayer?”⁶⁸ Calvin’s theology led him to understand that prayer must be practiced and not simply viewed as an intellectual exercise. He understood that two things should move the Christian to prayer. “The first is the command to pray which he has given us; the second is the promise that we will obtain everything for which we pray.”⁶⁹ These two parts, a command and a promise, should compel the Christian to pray. Failure to pray is disobedience to the very commands of God.

Calvin, like Luther, viewed a lack of prayer as breaking the commandment against taking the name of God in vain.⁷⁰ Calvin writes that “if, in all our necessities, we fail to approach him, to seek him and to request his aid, we both transgress his commandment and arouse his wrath no less than if we were to make other gods besides him or to forge idols.”⁷¹ The Christian who fails to come to God in prayer breaks the commandments of God. Christians must come to God thanking and praising him for who

⁶⁷ Beeke and Najapfour, *Taking Hold of God*, 27.

⁶⁸ John Calvin and I. John Hesselink, *On Prayer: Conversation with God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 16.

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Robert White (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 525.

⁷⁰ Luther, in comments on the commandment concerning taking God’s name in vain, writes, “I have grievously and shamefully sinned against this commandment all my life. I have not only failed to invoke, extole, and honor his holy name, but have also been ungrateful for such gifts and have, by swering, lying, and betraying, missed them in pursuit of shame and sin.” Luther, *Little Prayer Book*, 268.

⁷¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 525.

he is and what he has done. The believer also must make his requests known to God. To fail at either is to fail to give God the honor due to him.

Giving honor to God requires a proper understanding of self and the human condition. Humbly approaching God is not easy since it goes against human nature to do so. Since the fall, each person is tempted with the idea first brought forth by the serpent in the garden, that “you will be like God” (Gen 3:5). Calvin notes, “We must lay aside any thought of our own glory, have done with any belief in self-worth and, ceasing to have any confidence in ourselves, let us in our humility and abasement give glory to God.”⁷² The Christian must understand that God is the only one to receive glory because God alone has done the work of salvation and the ongoing work of sanctification.

The ongoing work of sanctification means that sin continues to be a relentless struggle. For this reason, Christians approach God knowing that they are in desperate need because everyone has evil in their hearts no matter how good they appear (Luke 11:13). The presence of evil in the heart means that confession of sin is a necessary part of prayer, and coming to God to confess sin requires humility and abasement. Many Christians have become comfortable with the idea that everyone is a “sinner.” The result has been that the word *sinner* has lost much of its meaning. Calvin writes: “What do we think is more abominable to God than the kind of pretense and hypocrisy displayed by someone who asks pardon for his sins, while not thinking of himself as a sinner or even of his sin at all?”⁷³ There is no pardon without recognition of sin.

The command to pray is reinforced by another motive for Christians, which is the promise of prayer. Calvin writes that in the promise of prayer, people approach God and “directly remind him of his promises, so that in actual experience and as the need arises he may prove that what they believed on the basis of his word alone was neither

⁷² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 521.

⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 523.

false nor futile. Thus we understand that whatever God invites us to expect from him we are also commanded to ask for in prayer.”⁷⁴ The ability to ask in prayer means that prayer is not limited to appeasing an angry God, and instead, God allows requests to be made of him and then promises to answer them.

The Puritans understood that there was a biblical command to pray; they also understood the equally important promises of Scripture regarding prayer. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) writes, “What a shame is this to us, that God is more willing to be prayed to, and more ready to hear prayer, than we are to pray!”⁷⁵ Even knowing that God hears has not caused people to pray more. Christians continue to struggle with asking in prayer, just as the New Testament church did. The church does not have because they did not ask in prayer (Jas 4:2).

There are many reasons people do not ask in prayer. For some, it may be a lack of knowledge, busyness, or pride that prevents prayer. Henry notes that “it is desirable that our prayers should be copious and full; our burdens, cares, and wants are many, so are our sins and mercies. The promises are numerous and very rich, our God, will satisfy them with good things.”⁷⁶ Prayer provides access to God and the blessings of heaven to those who ask.

Even though God desires that Christians ask so that he can pour out blessings, care should be given in how one approaches God. Henry provides some helpful insights into biblical prayer. Henry writes, “God has something to say to us as a friend every day, by the written Word, in which we must hear his voice, by his providences, and by our own consciences.”⁷⁷ God is still speaking through his word, and his Spirit is bringing

⁷⁴ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 518.

⁷⁵ Matthew Henry, *Directions for Daily Communion with God*, vol. 1 of *Complete Works of Matthew Henry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 201.

⁷⁶ Matthew Henry, *Method for Prayer*, vol. 2 of *Complete Works of Matthew Henry*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 2.

⁷⁷ Henry, *Directions for Daily Communion with God*, 1:201-2.

conviction to the believer's conscience. Failure to listen to what God has communicated makes it difficult to pray right. Henry writes that Scripture is important to the believer's prayer life because "God's word must be the guide of your desires and the ground of your expectations in prayer; nor can you expect he should give a gracious ear what you say to him, if you turn a deaf ear to what he saith to you."⁷⁸ The one who ignores Scripture doubts God and one who doubts should "not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (Jas 1:7b). Making one's request to God in prayer, without doubt, places the request in the hands of a loving Father who is all-wise and knows what is best for his children.

God, however, knows all and is able in his wisdom to supply what is best for each situation. Thomas Watson (1620-1686) notes, "God is the best Father in respect to wisdom. . . . He has perfect wisdom in himself; he knows the fittest means to bring about his own designs. . . . He knows what is best for us. . . . He knows what affliction is best for us, and when it is fit to give a bitter portion. . . . He knows how to make evil things work for good for his children."⁷⁹ God, the heavenly Father, can work out even the most evil of circumstances for good in his infinite knowledge.

Our heavenly Father provides what is needed when it is needed. Henry states that "to wait on God, is to live a life of desire towards him, delight in him, dependence on him, devoted to him. . . . To wait on him as a beggar waits on his benefactor, with earnest desire to receive supplies from him."⁸⁰ The Christian who waits upon God for everything comes to understand that "blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt 5:3a).

Christians not only must wait upon God in prayer, but they also need help in knowing how to pray. Believers need help with what to pray because they lack the

⁷⁸ Henry, *Directions for Daily Communion with God*, 1:204.

⁷⁹ Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, rev. ed. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 4.

⁸⁰ Henry, *Directions for Daily Communion with God*, 1:216.

knowledge of themselves and the world around them to make the best decision. John Owen (1616-1683) writes that “no man can pray as he ought, because he is unacquainted with the matter of prayer, and knows not what to pray for. . . . Nature is so corrupted as to not understand its own depravation. . . . Nature is blind, and cannot see them [sins]; it is proud, and will not own them; stupid and senseless of them.”⁸¹ Human nature blinds the individual from seeing their true state, so help is needed even to pray. The Holy Spirit is the means of helping to guide the Christian into right prayer.

Most Christians do not understand how dependent on the Spirit they are for prayer. John Bunyan (1628-1688) writes, “We know not the matter of the things for which we should pray, neither the object to whom we pray, nor the medium by or through whom we pray; none of these things know we, but by the help and assistance of the Spirit.”⁸² Christians not only require help to know what to pray but need the Spirit’s help to know the God they pray to and Jesus by whom they gain access to God.

The Holy Spirit helps guide Christians to prayer and is needed to help continue prayer. Bunyan states that “when I go to pray, I find it so loth to go to God, and when it is with him, so loth to stay with him, that many times I am forced in my prayers, first to beg God that he would take my heart, and set it on himself in Christ, and when it is there, that he would keep it there.”⁸³ The mind is easily distracted, and the Spirit’s help is needed to set one’s mind on God and then to keep it there.

Unfortunately, many Christians often do not know or believe that they can or should be praying for more of the Holy Spirit. The Puritans, however, understood the need for the Holy Spirit not only to help in prayer but to live the Christian life. George Smeaton (1814-1889) writes,

⁸¹ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 4 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 279.

⁸² John Bunyan, *Prayer*, Puritan Paperbacks (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 24.

⁸³ Bunyan, *Prayer*, 32.

and no more mischievous and misleading theory could be propounded, nor any one more dishonoring to the Holy Spirit, than the principle that because the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the Church has no need, and no warrant, to pray any more for the effusion [outpouring] of the Spirit of God. On the contrary, the more the Church asks the Spirit and waits for His communication, the more she receives.⁸⁴

The Holy Spirit is needed and is to be asked for by the Church so that it might do the work of God on earth. Johnathan Edwards (1703-1758) affirmed the need when he wrote that “the Scriptures do not only direct and encourage us, in general, to pray for the Holy Spirit above all things else; but it is the expressly revealed will of God, that his church should be very much in prayer for that glorious outpouring of the Spirit that is to be in the latter days, and the things that shall be accomplished by it.”⁸⁵ The very Spirit of God has been made available to Christians to strengthen them so that they may be obedient to the commands of Christ.

Failure to ask for a greater filling of the Spirit has grave consequences. Spurgeon notes that “ever since certain brethren gave up asking for the Holy Spirit they have not had it, and they have gone aside into many inventions; if they will not ask they shall not have, but be it yours and mine to wait humbly and patiently upon the Lord that he may daily give us of his Spirit.”⁸⁶ Christians are promised that if they ask, they will receive (Mark 11:24). What greater blessing can there be than to cry out to God based on the promises of Scripture and then to receive a greater filling of the Spirit so that the believer’s life may be pleasing to God.

Conclusion

The Christian church, throughout its history, has been blessed to have Christians who knew the need for prayer. Spurgeon reminded his congregation that “to us

⁸⁴ George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 288-89.

⁸⁵ While Jonathan Edwards was not a Puritan, biographer George Marsden, noted that “Edwards was loyal to the theology inherited from the seventeenth-century Puritans.” George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 4.

⁸⁶ Spurgeon, “Right Replies to Right Requests No. 959,” 621.

poor, weak, erring mortals, prayer is an absolute necessity.”⁸⁷ Prayer allows access to the greatest source of help in the universe. Each day has its struggles, and through prayer, the believer calls upon God, who hears and answers those prayers. Bounds noted, “True prayers are born of present trials and present needs. Bread, for today, is bread enough. Bread given for today is the strongest sort of pledge that there will be bread tomorrow.”⁸⁸ Prayer for daily bread must be fervent and unceasing since each day brings new trials and new needs.

The biblical commands to pray along with the promises of God to answer those prayers should provide a powerful motivator to pray. Today as much as ever, Christians need to understand those motivations and pray. Unfortunately, prayer is not always viewed as favorably as other talents in the church. Bounds notes, “Many men, of this day, obtain a good report because of their money-giving, their great mental gifts and talents, but few there be who obtain a ‘good report’ because of their great faith in God, or because of the wonderful things which are being wrought through their great praying. Today, as much as at any time, we need men of great faith and men who are great in prayer.”⁸⁹ People of faith in prayer ask that the Holy Spirit bring revival to the church and a conviction of sin to the lost.

⁸⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Special Protracted Prayer No. 798,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 121, Logos Bible Software.

⁸⁸ Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 17.

⁸⁹ Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 20.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter details the planning and implementation of the ministry project at Grace Church of the Valley (GCV). The ministry project had an implementation period of eighteen weeks, with the last eight weeks being the project's culmination. The project's first phase focused on developing an eight-lesson curriculum that would facilitate the completion of project goal number two. The curriculum was also evaluated by a panel for approval. Curriculum development started in early February and was submitted to panel members on April 1, 2022.

The second phase of the project involved the promotion of the class as well as collecting data on the prayer habits of members and attendees at GCV. The survey data collection provided the needed information to complete the first goal. This was done by surveying four different groups in the church. The first surveys were administered to people attending the men's Wednesday-morning equipping hour. The following day the Thursday women's Bible study was surveyed. These two survey groups provided forty-one female and twenty-six male responses. Surveys were administered to two Sunday-morning classes for additional responses, which provided twenty-one male and seven female survey responses. A total of forty-seven men and forty-eight women were surveyed. Eleven church elders and pastors were also surveyed to see how they compared to the responses of church attendees. Ninety-five surveys were collected, and with average Sunday-morning adult attendance as of March 2022 around five hundred, the response was approximately 19 percent of attendees.

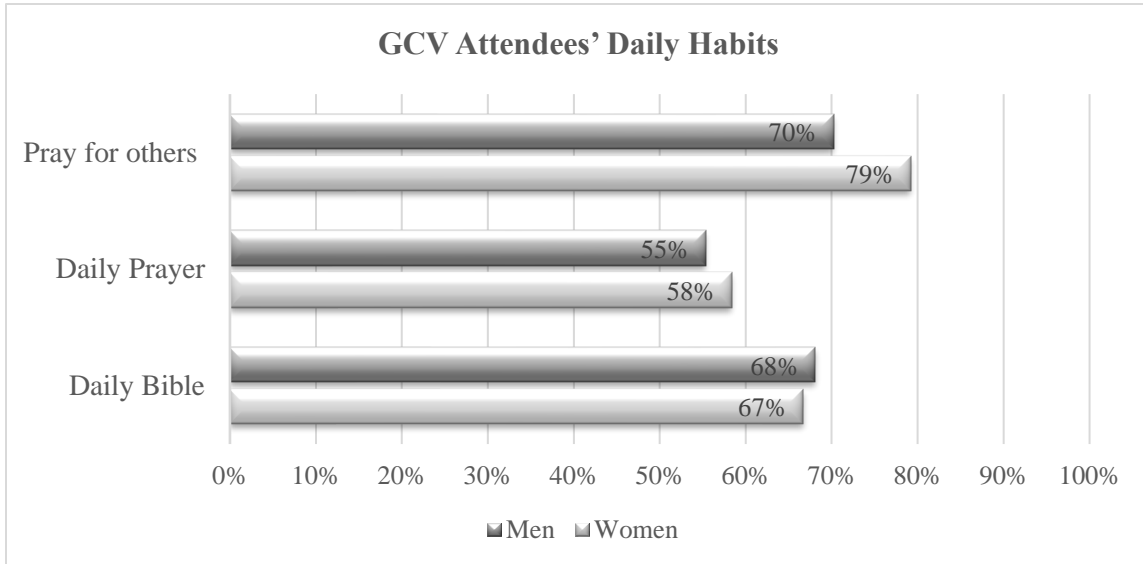


Figure 1. GCV attendees' daily habits

The survey's primary focus was to discover the daily habits regarding prayer and Bible reading of people attending GCV. The survey provided data on how much time was spent daily in Bible reading and prayer. The results indicated that the majority of people surveyed did have a daily habit of Bible reading and prayer (figure 1 above).

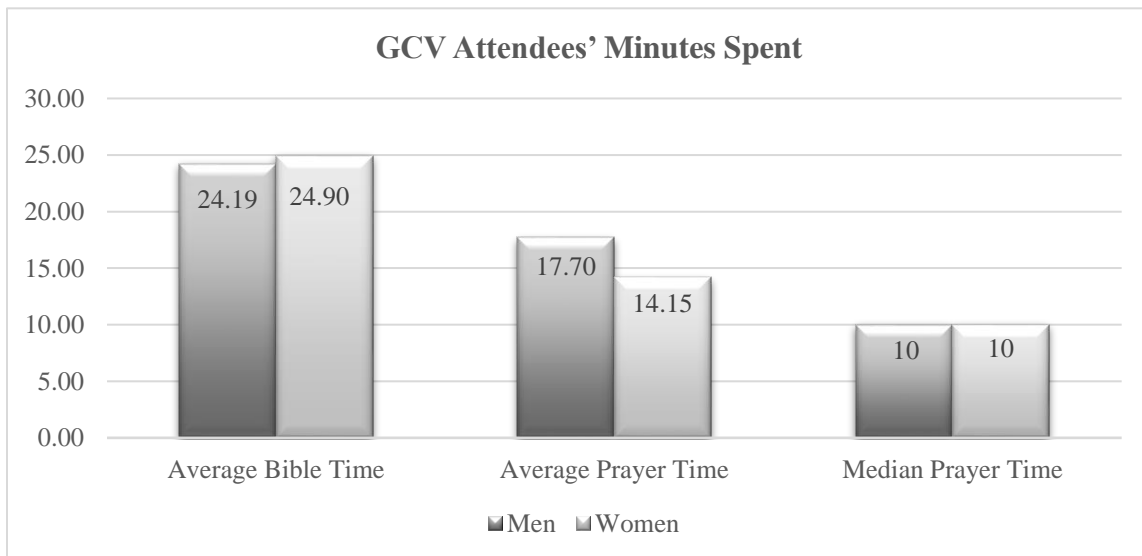


Figure 2. GCV attendees' minutes spent

Those who read spent around twenty-five minutes per day in their Bible, while those who prayed spent around fifteen minutes per day in prayer (figure 2 above).¹

Promotion of the class was carried out in several ways. The primary means of promotion was through the Sunday bulletin handed out to everyone as they entered the church. The bulletin lists all upcoming classes as well as the current options for Sunday-morning equipping classes. The class was also promoted in the Sunday service during announcements. Personal invitations were also extended to people during conversations prior to the class, and to the people who took part in the prayer habit survey.

Phase three was teaching the prayer class at GCV, thus completing goal number three. The class began on April 24, 2022, and ended on June 12, 2022. The original plan was for the class to go for eight weeks. However, the course went for seven weeks due to classroom availability issues. The result was that the eighth lesson was not taught in its entirety. Instead, the main topics from lesson eight were added to the last four lessons of the class.

The effectiveness of the lessons was measured in two ways. First, the lesson outline was evaluated by a panel of experts. The panel used a rubric² to grade the curriculum. Second, the effectiveness of the lessons was measured by surveying participants before and after the class.³

The final phase involved the fourth goal of the project, which was to develop a ministry plan to increase the practice of corporate prayer among attendees of Grace Church of the Valley. The first step in completing this goal was meeting with the senior pastor and associate, who reviewed and approved moving forward with the proposed

¹ It should be noted that those who took the survey attended more than just the Sunday-morning worship service which could mean they are more likely to read their Bible and pray than those attenders who come only to the Sunday-morning services.

² See appendix 3.

³ See appendix 1.

ministry plan. The ministry plan was then submitted to a panel of three pastors and staff for evaluation using a rubric.⁴

Overview of Curriculum Content

The curriculum was designed to help individuals at all levels of spiritual growth learn and grow in prayer. Four learning outcomes were determined in the creation: (1) look at the practice of prayer in both the Old and New Testaments, as well as in church history; (2) equip students to understand and apply biblical principles to the practice of prayer; (3) help students gain confidence and be more biblical in their prayer life through the study of Scripture and other resources; (4) communicate the great need in the church for both individual and corporate prayer.

Lesson 1: “What Is Prayer?”

The first lesson created a foundation for the Christian understanding of prayer. Prayer is not unique to Christianity because people from all areas and religions often have some form of prayer. People pray everywhere, so prayer must be understood based on what is revealed in the Bible. An individual’s understanding of prayer reveals much about what that person believes about God and the Bible. The lesson began by using several sources to help define biblical prayer. After defining biblical prayer, the focus moved to how Christians convey their messages to God. The primary text for this lesson was Matthew 7:7-11, in which Jesus teaches how the Father, who is greater than all, will give to those who ask in prayer. Jesus not only tells his followers that God hears them but encourages them to ask for things. Christians are to ask, and they are told that God, who is their heavenly Father, will give even better gifts than an earthly father. The lesson concluded with participants writing out a prayer of their own based on what they learned.

⁴ See appendix 7.

Lesson 2: “Who Do We Pray To?”

The second lesson focused on having proper theology through studying the God Christians pray to. The intent was to help people understand that Christians pray to God, and more specifically, they pray to the God revealed in the Bible. Knowing who God is and what he has promised is the foundation for Christian prayer. Many passages in both the Old and New Testaments were covered in this lesson. Studying these different passages helped deal with the question, “If God is sovereign, why do we need to pray?” Four reasons were given for why Christians pray to a sovereign God. First, Christians are commanded to pray (Jas 5:16; 1 Thess 5:17); second, it is part of building fellowship with God (1 John 1:3); third, it allows access to gifts we might not otherwise receive (Jas 4:2); and finally, God sovereignly inspires our prayers (Phil 2:12-13; Isa 14:24; Rom 8:26-27).

Time was also given to helping participants understand that God is not sought within as a mystical experience; rather biblical spirituality points to a God who is wholly other. Since mysticism has crept into many modern teachings on prayer, it was essential to discuss this topic. The lesson concluded by looking at Hezekiah’s prayer for deliverance (Isa 37:15-20) and how that prayer could inform the participants’ prayers. The participants then wrote out a prayer of their own based on what they learned that day.

Lesson 3: “How We Pray”

Lesson three dealt with how Christians pray. The class started with teaching how the names of God provide insight into the character of God. Four characteristics of prayer were expounded from Ephesians 6:18. The four characteristics were praying at all times, keeping alert, perseverance, and supplication for all the saints. The lesson then moved to how knowing more about God’s character helps believers in prayer.

Three of Jesus’s parables (Luke 11:58; 18:1-8, 9-14) were then studied to better understand how one should pray. The first two parables focused on being persistent in prayer and the final one on recognizing who Christians are before a holy God. The

lesson concluded by looking at the importance of humility in the Christian life and prayer. The primary text for this section was Isaiah 57:15 and Isaiah 66:2. Having a proper understanding of prayer is necessary for prayer that is pleasing and acceptable to God. The class concluded with the participants writing out a prayer based on what they learned that day.

Lesson 4: “What We Pray: Confession and Thanksgiving”

Lesson four looked at what Scripture teaches about the need for prayer and the types of prayer to be made. The class opened with a discussion on reasons for prayer and models for prayer that people use. The hope was to help those who do not always know what they should be praying about. The lesson focused on two types of prayer: confession and thanksgiving. Because humans are sinners, confession is needed for spiritual health, and without it, prayers are hindered. Time was spent looking at 1 John 1:8-9 and 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 on the need for confession and repentance.

Thankfulness in prayer was also examined. Gratitude toward God is needed because we are dependent on him for all things. Two passages were studied to remind everyone that first, there is nothing we have that we did not receive (1 Cor 4:7), and second, that we should have thankful hearts (Col 3:15-17). A warning was also given to pay attention to what we most often give thanks for. What we give thanks for may reveal idols in our hearts.

Romans 1:8-10 provided a guide for prayers of thanksgiving. Paul was thankful for what can be described as signs of grace. These signs of grace include things such as faith, love, and perseverance. The class closed with participants breaking into groups for a time of prayer that specifically focused on prayers of thanksgiving.

Lesson 5: “What We Pray: Intercession and Petition”

Lesson five focused on prayers of intercession, petition, and lament. The lesson began with an overview of the life of George Müller. Few accounts can rival Müller’s account of God’s working in his life and ministry. Müller’s autobiography was recommended to provide an encouragement to pray and allow readers to see how much can be accomplished through prayer.⁵ The lesson then examined the differences in these three types of prayer and their biblical justification.

The Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 was the lesson’s primary focus. Six key points were considered: the hallowing of God’s name, the coming of his kingdom, doing of God’s will, physical and material needs, spiritual needs, and divine protection. Each of these points should help guide prayers of petition and intercession. This lesson also dealt with the question of whether God answers all prayers of intercession and petition or just some of them. Three requirements for prayer were considered from John 15:7 and Matthew 6:25. The first requirement was that the believer must abide in Christ, and the Word must abide in the believer. The second requirement was that they must believe, and the third was that the request is according to God’s will.

The lesson then covered the theological and the practical reasons for prayers of lament. Prayers of lament can be a source of comfort during times of difficulties and sorrow. The class concluded with the participants breaking into groups for a time of prayer specifically focused on prayers of intercession for others.

Lesson 6: “The Holy Spirit in Prayer”

Lesson six was on prayer regarding evangelism and the Holy Spirit. Prayer is needed because no amount of human effort in evangelism can change the heart, which

⁵ There are a numorus books available about the life of Müller; one of those is George Müller, *The Autobiography of George Müller* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985). Another is a two-volume set that includes additional information as well as sermons: George Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord’s Dealings with George Müller* (Muskegon, MI: Dust & Ashes, 2003).

means help is required, and that help comes through prayer. The section of the lesson on prayer in evangelism focused on three points. First, prayer is needed for assistance in carrying out the Great Commission. Second, prayer is needed for workers to preach the gospel, and finally, prayer is needed to change the heart of the unregenerate who are dead in sin.

The Holy Spirit who helps us in prayer was the focus of the second half of the lesson. Romans 8:26-27 revealed how the Spirit helps when we are physically and spiritually frail. In our weakness, the Spirit guides our prayers. Being guided by the Spirit means that these prayers are aligned with the Father's will. The section closed by looking at the need to pray for a greater manifestation of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Quotations from George Smeaton, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Spurgeon were used to help demonstrate the need for greater outpourings of the Spirit. The goal of such prayer is not for greater external signs or displays as some desire but that God would be more hallowed in the Christian's life. The participants then divided into groups for a time of prayer specifically focused on praying for the lost and for a greater working of the Spirit in their lives.

Lesson 7: "Hindrances to Prayer"

Lesson seven primarily dealt with hindrances to prayer. However, the class started with a brief discussion on where we pray. Christians should pray everywhere, with family, in small gatherings, alone, and in worship services. This included a discussion on how people often talk about how they pray everywhere or throughout the day, but many times those people have no set time for prayer. Prayers are thrown up for whatever they are dealing with, but no time is dedicated to seeking God. Since the first few weeks of the class focused on the need for prayer, it was important to also understand what hinders prayer in Christian life. The class looked at seven common hindrances to prayer and how they can be overcome.

The first hindrance was marital or family discord and strife, based on 1 Peter 3:7. The second hindrance was pride and was based on the parable in Luke 18:10-14. Sin and idolatry were the third hindrance to prayer (1 John 3:21-22; Ezek 14:1-3; Jas 4:3-4). The fourth hindrance was unforgiveness (Mark 11:25). Doubt or lack of trust in God was the fifth hindrance (Jas 1:6-7). The sixth hindrance was a lack of reconciliation (Matt 5:23-24). The final hindrance was material things that distract us from prayer (Matt 6:20). Following the lesson, the participants then broke into groups for a prayer time specifically focused on praying that God would help them see and remove hindrances to prayer from their lives.

Lesson 8: “Putting Prayer into Practice”

The final lesson for week eight was designed for additional time in prayer. While the classroom that was used for the class was no longer available, an office was made available for a time of prayer. The first seven classes averaged around twenty-five participants per week. Those who attended week seven were invited to come back the following week to have a time of prayer. An email was also sent to those who missed the last class to come for the prayer time. The time of prayer for week eight had six people in attendance.

The goal of the eighth class was to put the lessons learned in the first seven classes into practice. The prayer time was directed, with the first block of time dedicated to adoration and thanksgiving to God. The attendees present took turns praising and thanking God for who he is and what he has done. The remainder of the time was devoted to prayers of intercession and petition. Then prayer was directed toward the spiritual and material needs of people in the church. The attendees in the class then took turns praying for individuals around them and people in their lives who needed prayer.

Assessment of the Curriculum

Three methods were used to assess the success of the lessons for the project. First, the lessons were sent to an expert panel to be evaluated using a grading rubric⁶ to examine the effectiveness of the curriculum in creating a culture of prayer. The panel consisted of three pastors who minister at different churches in California and two professors who are faculty at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Second, the participants in the class were given pre-and post-surveys. The surveys were given to measure if there was a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-survey scores. Participants were given the survey before the beginning of the first class and after the completion of week seven. Those who took part in the prayer class ranged in age from fourteen to sixty-four years of age.

The third assessment of the class was a course evaluation that was given at the end of the last class.⁷ The evaluation aimed to collect information on how well the information was communicated to the class. There were five questions and a fill-in option for attendees who wanted to provide feedback. One of the participants wrote, “It’s amazing already. It has put my feet to the fire. It’s showing how shallow my growth is, how weak it is and how much help from God I need.” The feedback provided will be helpful when teaching future classes.

Conclusion

Developing a culture of prayer at GCV was the purpose of this project. This chapter covered the steps taken to develop an eight-week prayer class, the promotion of the class, and collecting data on the prayer habits of attendees of GCV. An overview of each class and an assessment of the curriculum were provided. The next chapter will provide a review and analysis of the project to see whether the goals of the project were

⁶ See appendix 2.

⁷ See appendix 4.

met and to provide concluding reflections.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Creating a project that seeks to change church culture for the better is a lofty goal. Upon completion of the project, it is wise to assess and reflect on the outcomes. Without evaluation, there is no way to determine the effectiveness of the project. This final chapter will evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry project at GCV. In order to assess the project, I will evaluate several items; first, was the project successful in meeting the stated purpose and goals? Second, the project's strengths and weaknesses will be reviewed. Third, I will be answering the question of what I would do differently. Finally, I will describe what I learned theologically and provide my reflections on the project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

While the need for and the benefits of prayer are often mentioned in church, many Christians find it challenging to put it into practice regularly. The purpose of this project was to create a culture of prayer at GCV by equipping members to pray consistently and biblically. The motivation for the project came from reading Christian authors from the Reformation onward who continually reiterated the importance of the practice of prayer. The project sought to remind people of this important Christian practice. The project was successful in helping those who attended the class pray more consistently and biblically, as will be indicated below. However, much work is needed to develop a culture of prayer for GCV.

The limited reach of the teaching portion of the project meant that it could only begin the process of changing the culture at GCV. The broad nature of the project's

purpose, “create a culture of prayer at GCV,” was overly ambitious based on the limited scope of the training. A more concise purpose statement would have been better suited for the project, such as, “The purpose of this project was to foster a culture of prayer at GCV by equipping a select group of participants to pray consistently and biblically.”

Limiting the scope of the project would have made the project purpose more achievable with the limited audience available. Such a broad purpose statement would require support from the church leadership and require sermons, small groups, and equipping classes working toward this common purpose. There is undoubtedly potential for the people who attended the class to affect the culture. However, the time required to achieve this goal would place it outside this project’s scope.

Evaluation of the Project’s Goals

This ministry project had four goals, each measured to determine its success in fulfilling the project’s purpose. Each goal was evaluated based on the methodology presented in chapter 1. The first goal was to assess the current prayer practices of the people attending GCV. The second goal was to develop an eight-week curriculum on prayer. The third goal was to use the curriculum to teach a class on prayer. The fourth goal was to create a ministry plan to encourage corporate prayer. Based on the methodology chosen, all of the goals were successfully completed.

Goal One: Assess Current Prayer Practices

To accomplish the first goal, I utilized a prayer practice survey to assess the current prayer habits of attendees at GCV.¹ The survey was conducted with forty-seven men and forty-eight women. Eleven GCV elders and pastors also participated in the survey, which allowed for a comparison to the responses of church attendees. A total of

¹ See appendix 1.

ninety-five surveys were collected. The average Sunday attendance at the time of the survey in March 2022 was around five hundred adults. Based on the response rate, approximately 19 percent of attendees participated. Figure 3 shows the percentage of those surveyed who have a dedicated time of daily Bible reading and prayer. Figure 4 shows how many minutes in prayers were spent by men, women, and elders.

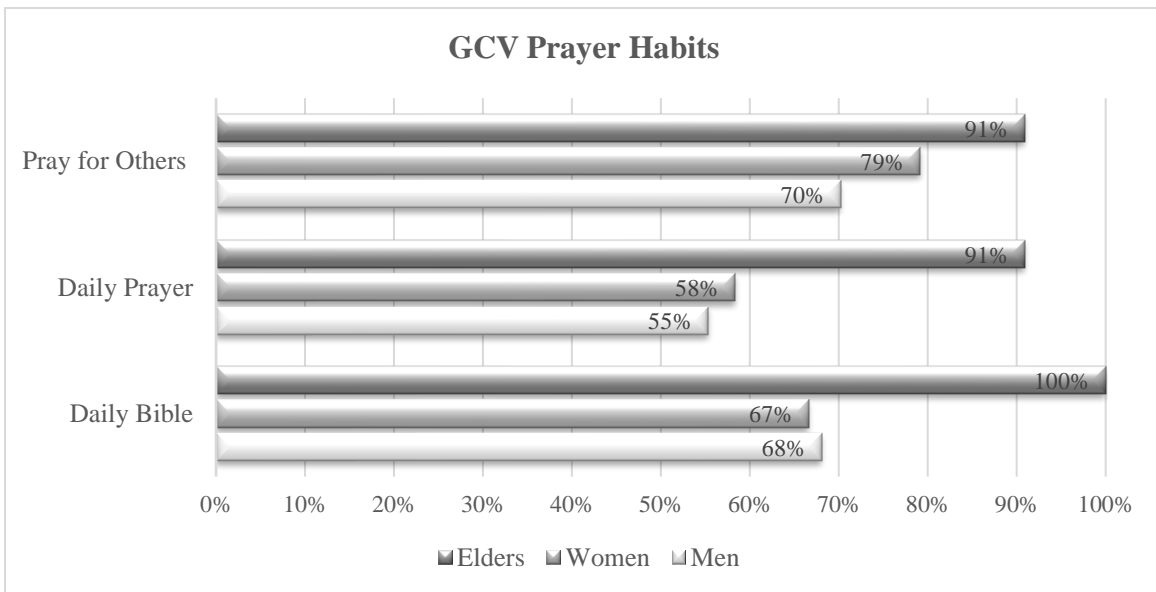


Figure 3. GCV prayer habits

The survey did not ask whether people pray since it was assumed that most Christians pray at some level.² Instead, the focus was on whether the person had a dedicated prayer time each day and, if so, how much time was spent in prayer. The survey also asked whether respondent had a dedicated time for Bible reading and, if so, how many minutes they spent on average.

² It is possible that this was a faulty assumption and that one of the questions should have asked if the respondent prayed daily even if they do not have a dedicated time of prayer. This question might have issues as well if people felt uncomfortable saying they do not pray.

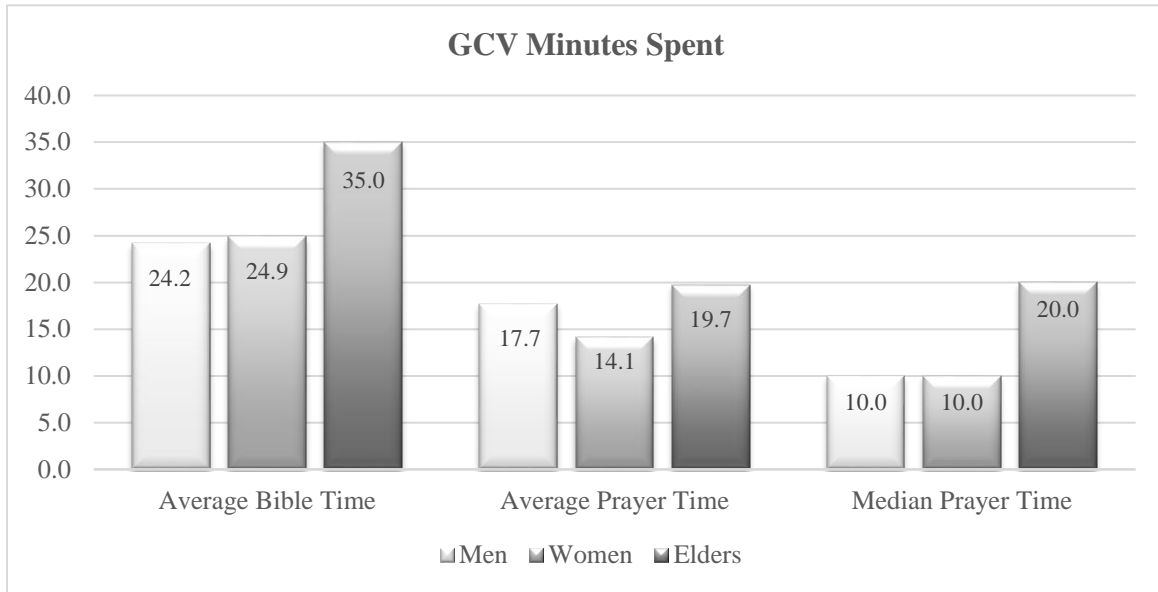


Figure 4. GCV minutes spent

The average prayer time for the elders is higher because one person prays more than twice the average. If that person is removed, the average prayer time is 15.64 minutes, which is between the average for men and women. Based on that number, people attending GCV have prayer times corresponding to the men in church leadership. This project does not cover the question of what is an adequate amount of time in prayer or how much time the church desires for people to be in prayer.

Goal Two: Develop Class Curriculum on Prayer

The goal of developing a curriculum was completed.³ The accomplishment of this goal was measured by an expert panel of three pastors and a professor. This panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the curriculum's relevance, biblical theology, scope, and sufficiency.⁴ This goal was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion was met on the grading rubric. There were four possible grades for

³ See appendix 5.

⁴ See appendix 3.

each question in the grading rubric. Each of the four grades was then assigned a score to calculate whether the goal was met. The possible grades were as follows (weighted score in parenthesis): insufficient (1), requires attention (2), sufficient (3), and exemplary (4). To achieve the goal, 90 percent on the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the “sufficient level”; the panel members approved the curriculum with 100 percent of the evaluation criteria meeting or exceeding the sufficient level. The goal was met with 100 percent of the evaluations giving the project at least a sufficient grade. Based on the weighted score, the curriculum received 121 out of 128, 95 percent. Little feedback was given outside of the score given except for one-panel member who asked about adding lament to the curriculum. A section on prayers of lament was added to week 5.

Goal Three: Use the Curriculum to Teach Methods of and the Importance of Prayer

The goal of teaching the curriculum was accomplished.⁵ The goal was to use the curriculum to increase the knowledge of the people participating in the class so that they would pray consistently and biblically. The effectiveness of the curriculum was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey to the participants.⁶ The survey had two parts that were measured. The first five questions in section one of the survey were measured to determine whether there was an increase in the respondents’ practice of prayer.

Questions 1, 2, and 5 of the survey were yes/no, and questions three and four required a numerical answer. Questions 9-31 were on a Likert scale. The Likert scale was as follows: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), somewhat disagree (3), somewhat agree (4), agree (5), or strongly agree (6). The best answer was “strongly agree,” except for

⁵ See appendix 4.

⁶ See appendix 1.

question seventeen, which was reverse scored starting with disagree (6) and going down for the purpose of the *t*-test.

The class successfully increased the averages of participants' responses regarding understanding the theology and practice of prayer. A *t*-test was used to determine that the improvement seen in the survey responses was statistically significant ($t_{(11)} = -2.560$, $p < .05$). Due to the limited number of matched surveys, an unpaired test was completed as well, which also indicated statistically significant improvement ($t_{(36)} = -2.475$, $p < .05$).

The practice of prayer and not just the understanding of prayer was also an important consideration. A test was also run on the survey results to see if there was an increase in the time spent in prayer. The average time spent in prayer per day was 14.8 minutes in the pre-survey and rose to 19.0 minutes in the post-survey. The *t*-test demonstrated that this was a statistically significant increase ($t_{(11)} = -1.545$, $p < .05$).

Nineteen pre- and post-surveys were collected from people in attendance. The class had over thirty people attend at different times and an average attendance of over twenty per week. Unfortunately, when the surveys were collected, the paired surveys did not meet the project goal of fifteen survey responses. Based on this standard, the third goal was not successfully completed. While the plan of attaining fifteen matched surveys was not achieved because several post-surveys could not be compared to the pre-surveys. The class did have a positive effect on participants, so overall, the goal was successful.

Goal Four: Developing a Strategic Ministry Plan

Since the church currently has no regular time dedicated to corporate prayer, the final goal was to develop a strategic ministry plan to increase the practice of prayer individually and corporately among attendees of GCV.⁷ The plan was to create a regular

⁷ See appendix 6.

time of prayer at the church. Achievement of the goal was measured by a panel of three GCV staff and pastors who utilized a rubric to evaluate the plan's potential and feasibility within the church. This goal was deemed successful when all criteria were rated as sufficient or exemplary by the panel members.

Strengths of the Project

The project had three main strengths. The first strength of the project was how each goal was connected to the previous one. The project started by assessing the prayer practices of GCV in the first goal. This led to the second goal: the development of an eight-week curriculum which led to the third goal of teaching the curriculum. The final goal sought to develop a ministry plan to increase the corporate practice of prayer at GCV. Each goal was built on the previous goal, allowing the project to be completed.

The second strength was the application portion at the end of each class session. Application allowed participants to immediately put into practice what had been learned in that day's lesson. For example, participants gathered in small groups to pray and thank God after the lesson on thanksgiving in prayer. Each class closed with a time of prayer in which people could hear others put into practice what they had learned. Some who were not comfortable praying in groups during the first few classes were praying out loud in subsequent classes.

The third and most significant strength of the projects was teaching and providing a biblically based curriculum on prayer. GCV has had classes on many topics, including theology, marriage, biblical counseling, and how to study your Bible. This class was the first curriculum whose sole focus was prayer. A class on prayer is vital because many Christians who have attended church for years may not have a thoroughly biblical understanding of prayer. People at GCV come from various church backgrounds, some with little or no teaching on prayer. Others have been taught about prayer but not always

with a solid biblical foundation. Without a proper biblical foundation, prayer loses its theological moorings that make true prayer possible.

The first two lessons of the class built a foundation for the remaining lessons. Lesson 1 was on what biblical prayer is and is not. Many religions involve prayer, so it is crucial to define biblical prayer. The second lesson dealt with who God is. There is no assurance that prayer will be heard or answered until one understands the nature and character of God. Each lesson built on that foundation to provide a comprehensive view of Christian prayer.

Weaknesses of the Project

On reflection, there were some weaknesses that could be improved on the project. The first was the timing of the class, which coincided with the three additional equipping classes and the beginning of summer vacation. The Sunday-morning equipping hour is scheduled on a quarterly system of ten weeks. The church offered the fourth quarter of 2021-2022 available, and I agreed because it lined up with the doctoral program schedule. Class started in late April, and there was a drop in attendance for all classes as the end of May approached. People began traveling, and church attendance, as well as class attendance, dropped noticeably. Selecting a different time of the year for the class would most likely help maintain steady attendance.

The other weakness related to timing was that the equipping hour had additional options. GCV typically has only two class options available for adults on Sunday mornings with the exception of membership or baptism classes. However, for the first time, the church decided to offer three other classes in addition to the prayer class. Since there were so many options during the equipping hour this quarter, there were many who wanted to check out more than one class. This added to the difficulty of keeping attendance steady.

The second weakness was the location of the class and the time constraints it caused. Due to classroom availability issues, the prayer class used the backstage area of the main sanctuary. The class space was far from the other rooms, and it was more of a common room and not a closed-off classroom. Band members would also occasionally walk through the backstage area. It is also where the worship band gathers before church, so the class could not run overtime without significant interruption. Each lesson concluded with a time of prayer, which meant that if the teaching went long, the prayer time was cut short. On some mornings teaching had to be adjusted to allow for time to pray.

The third weakness was the broad scope of the project. Creating a culture of prayer was the intent of the project. While the class could help the individuals attending to have a greater appreciation for the practice of prayer, participants made up only about four percent of people attending on Sunday mornings. Having one class with only twenty-five people cannot change a large culture. Without being able to teach large numbers, the project as designed can only begin the process of changing the culture at GCV.

The fourth weakness was the pre- and post-surveys. The goal was to collect fifteen survey sets. Nineteen surveys were collected at the beginning of the class and also at the end. Initially, it appeared that only two survey sets were needed to achieve the goal of fifteen. After closer examination, it was determined that only half of the surveys could be matched. Several people joined the class after week two, and several who were in the class missed the last week or two.

What I Would Do Differently

The weaknesses of the project led to a couple of things that could be done differently. The first change would be to schedule the class for the second or third quarter instead of the fourth on the schedule. This would mean that it would start in early

October and be completed by the end of November. The first quarter classes have problems because they start while people are trying to take their last vacation of the year, so the first few weeks of equipping classes tend to have low attendance.

The location for a course on prayer is important. Some classes are not significantly affected by interruptions or mild distractions. Teaching the need for prayer and then having people put what they have learned into practice is difficult when people walk through the room. Having a quiet room that was out of the way and permitted classes to run long if needed would be beneficial. A quiet, private room would allow people to pray in small groups without feeling rushed. Some of the people attending the class did not pray the first few weeks because they were uncomfortable praying in front of others. Having more time for prayer would have given them more opportunities to pray in public.

Another thing that could be done differently would be how the class was promoted. The class was promoted in several ways that did help get the word out. However, one thing that could have been helpful would be for the senior pastor to mention the class to the congregation before it began and reiterate the importance of prayer for the church. The pastor's opinion carries a lot of weight in the church. Having the pastor talk about the class either as an announcement or by interviewing the person teaching the class during the Sunday worship service could increase interest.

The final change I would have made to do things differently would be to keep better track of attendance. Keeping better track of people joining the class late and those who miss. Being more intentional about tracking people would make it easier to know who missed a class and should have a link to the recordings sent to them. This would increase the number of people who could take the survey.

Theological Reflections

For humanity, there is no study greater than that of theology since the subject is the infinite God. Spending two years studying prayer from a biblical perspective, specifically Matthew 7:7-11, Romans 8:26-27, Colossians 1:9-11, and James 1:6-8 and 4:2-3, provided a strong foundation for believing in the power of prayer. These passages were built upon during the study of prayer from the perspective of Puritans and more modern writers. This study was, at times, like drinking from a fire hose.

While one can turn to countless Bible passages for help in prayer, Matthew 7:7-11 stands out because it gives a glimpse into the heart of God as father. First, Jesus is teaching that we can and should ask (Matt 7:7). Christians are given the great privilege of making requests of God. Second, Jesus describes people as evil yet giving gifts to their children. The point Jesus is trying to drive home is that if evil people can provide for their children, how much more will the heavenly Father provide good gifts to his children (Matt 7:11). These good gifts come because the child asks, and without asking, the child does not receive. The wonderful truth of this passage is that the Father gives to those who ask him. That also includes providing the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:13).

The second passage I selected was Romans 8:26-27. This passage was chosen because prayer can be challenging for many reasons. Knowing that believers needed help, God provided that help through his Holy Spirit. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to help believers overcome the challenges they face in prayer. Suffering, affliction, sin, and pain are all part of the human experience (Rom 8:10). Because of this, Christians are provided help in prayer by the Spirit. The Spirit intercedes on behalf of Christians when they do not know what to pray (Rom 8:26). That intercession on behalf of Christians has the further advantage of always being “according to the will of God” (Rom 8:27). Human nature blinds us to the truths of God and many times causes us to make wrong requests of our Heavenly Father. It is a comforting fact that the Spirit is making petitions on our behalf that are uncorrupted by our flesh.

The corruption of the flesh means that Christians must be careful to have the right motives in asking, which ties into James 4:2-3. Not only must Christians check their motives for their request, but they must also have faith that God can and will answer (James 1:6-8). Faith means not that there is a complete absence of any uncertainty but that one has made a habit of living in faith and is not double-minded, torn between wanting God and wanting the things of this world. To help counter doubt and double-mindedness, Paul reminds us that prayer should include requests for wisdom and knowing God's will (Col 1:9-11). When Christians walk in faith, they live a life "fully pleasing to him" (Col 1:10b).

Personal Reflections

Over the years, I became keenly aware that so many of the accounts of Christian men and women who had remarkable relationships with God were people of prayer. Men and women desired to spend time with God daily because they recognized their utter dependence on him. I decided I wanted to grow in my own prayer practice and try to help people develop their prayer habits. I desired to be part of a group that saw their neediness and, in response, went to their Heavenly Father to ask that their needs be met. This desire was the motivation for this project.

This desire was growing for most of the second year of the project. Most of the second year was spent researching and writing about the theological basis and historical issues of prayer. It was an excellent time to study Scripture and history to understand better the vital nature of prayer in the Christian life. Often, I would stop and ponder some new insight into prayer. Matthew 7:7-11 has been impactful in my understanding that God wants us to ask, seek, and knock because he desires to give his children good gifts.

One of the great struggles is failing to trust God; when we fail to trust, we often fail to pray. It becomes difficult when we lose sight of the fact that God has promised that we cannot even imagine what he has prepared for us (1 Cor 2:9) or that he

can do far more than we can imagine (Eph 3:20). As we come to believe this we come to see how great prayer is. George Müller writes,

It is not enough for the believer to begin to pray, nor to pray correctly; nor is it enough to continue for a time to pray. We must patiently, believingly continue in prayer until we obtain an answer. Further, we have not only to continue in prayer until the end, but we have also to believe that God does hear us and will answer our prayers. Most frequently we fail in not continuing in prayer until the blessing is obtained, and in not expecting the blessing.⁸

Conclusion

Creating a culture of prayer was the purpose of this project. While changing the culture was beyond the ability of this project, a start has been made. The project began the process of cultivating a culture of prayer with a curriculum that can be used by others within the church to continue the process of encouraging people at GCV to greater lives of prayer. Though there were indeed challenges along the way, I am thankful for the opportunity to spend so much time studying the topic of prayer. In the end, the only thing that matters is that God is glorified. If this project has or will help people in the future, it was a success. “To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim 1:17).

⁸ George Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller*, (Muskegon, MI: Dust & Ashes, 2003) 1:603.

APPENDIX 1

PRAYER PRACTICE SURVEY

The following survey was administered to help provide an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the participant's knowledge and practice of prayer.

PRAYER PRACTICE SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify your current understanding of prayer and the practice of it. Jason S. Egli is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Section I

The first section of this questionnaire will include some demographic information.

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

1. How many hours a week are spent in Bible reading for personal study or devotions?

2. Do you have a daily practice of praying with or for other people?
___ A. Yes
___ B. No
3. How long have you been a Christian?
___ A. 0-5
___ B. 6-10
___ C. 11-15
___ D. 16-20
___ E. 21-25
___ F. 26 and over
4. What is your age?
___ A. 18-24
___ B. 25-34
___ C. 35-44
___ D. 45-54
___ E. 55-64
___ F. 65 and over
5. Gender?
___ A. Male
___ B. Female

Part 2: Biblical Foundations

Directions: Answer the questions and statements below using the following options:
 (1) place a check by multiple-choice answers, and (2) based on the following scale, circle the option that best represents your agreement with the statement:
 SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,
 AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 6. I talk to God regularly throughout the day. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. I have a dedicated time in my day set aside for prayer. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I have a dedicated time in my Day set aside for reading the Bible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. Prayer feels like a shopping list. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. When I do not feel like praying, I pray even harder. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. I feel comfortable praying with other people. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. I regularly pray with other people. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. I pray five or more days a week. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. I am satisfied with the daily time I have set aside for prayer. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. I can confidently explain biblical principles of prayer. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. I regularly pray Bible passages during my prayer time. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. My spiritual health is directly affected by my prayer life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. I have a hunger for God's Word. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. I have a person in my life who disciples me. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. I am currently discipling another believer. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 21. I know how to study the Bible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

22. I enjoy studying the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. I feel like my prayer life is growing.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. I am currently growing spiritually.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 2

AVERAGE SCORES ADJUSTED FOR T-TESTS

Table A1 includes the average scores of the pre- and post-tests with question 17 adjusted with reverse scoring for when the desired answer was 1 instead of 6. The table includes the net gain from the pre-test to the post-test.

Table A1. Average scores for pre- and post-surveys

Question	Pre-test average	Post-test average	Net Change
1	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	N/A	N/A	N/A
3	15.167	22.833	7.667
4	14.833	19.000	4.167
5	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	N/A	N/A	N/A
7	N/A	N/A	N/A
8	N/A	N/A	N/A
9	4.667	5.083	0.417
10	2.167	2.250	0.083
11	3.667	4.083	0.417
12	3.083	3.250	0.167
13	4.917	4.250	-0.667
14	4.167	3.917	-0.250
15	4.250	4.750	0.500
16	2.250	2.667	0.417
17	5.417	5.500	0.083
18	5.167	5.417	0.250
19	5.333	5.667	0.333
20	5.750	5.583	-0.167
21	5.000	5.167	0.167
22	4.917	4.917	0.000
23	3.667	4.667	1.000

Question	Pre-test average	Post-test average	Net Change
24	2.667	3.667	1.000
25	5.083	5.250	0.167
26	4.250	5.000	0.750
27	5.083	5.250	0.167
28	5.333	5.333	0.000
29	4.333	5.000	0.667
30	4.917	5.167	0.250
31	2.583	2.500	-0.083

APPENDIX 3
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate the prayer curriculum I developed and distributed to the selected panel of experts in the goal section of chapter 1.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Prayer Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson to Be Evaluated:					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The material is clearly relevant to the issue of prayer.			1	3	
The material is biblical and theologically consistent.				4	
The material includes vital information for Christian faith and the personal development of a believer.			1	3	
The material clearly lays out that Christians must be devoted to prayer.			1	3	
The points of the material clearly support the purpose laid out in the thesis and are easy to grasp.			1	3	
The lesson contains points of practical application.			1	3	
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			1	3	
Overall, the lesson is clear and could be re-taught by another person.			1	3	
Total Points			21	100	

APPENDIX 4

PRAYER CLASS EVALUATION FORM

The following class evaluation was used to evaluate the prayer class taught at GCV.

PRAYER CLASS EVALUATION FORM

Prayer Class Evaluation

- 1. The information was helpful. SD D DS AS A SA
- 2. The presentation was easy to understand. SD D DS AS A SA
- 3. Content was applicable to my prayer life. SD D DS AS A SA
- 4. Would recommend this class to others. SD D DS AS A SA
- 5. Materials and handouts were helpful. SD D DS AS A SA
- 6. What would make this prayer class better?

Average score

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
5.75	5.65	5.8	5.7	5.7

APPENDIX 5
PRAYER CLASS CURRICULUM

This appendix contains the curriculum for an eight-week prayer class that was used to teach members and attendees at GCV about the importance of prayer.

Prayer Class Week 1 What Is Prayer?

Thank you for joining me this morning as we look at the practice of prayer.
My desire is to see people draw closer to God through prayer.

And my hope is that in each class, you will come away with things you can implement in your prayer time
My hope is that this will be of practical help to all of you.

We will look at the What, Why, When, and How of prayer

What is prayer, Why we pray. What we pray, How we pray, and finally, hindrances to prayer.

Many times we do not even realize how much we need prayer.

If you did not register online and fill out a prayer survey, please take a few minutes and fill one out.

Also, hand out 3x5 card for questions on prayer.

John Owen wrote, “He who prays as he ought will endeavor to live as he prays.”

Book recommendation

Arthur Bennett: *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*

Many views and descriptions of prayer

What are some of the things that come to mind when describing prayer?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Common descriptions of prayer

1. Prayer is a petition to God
2. Prayer is communication with God
3. Prayer is an attempt to connect with God
4. Prayer is an attempt to manipulate the divine

We are going to look at three descriptions of prayer.

1. We have one for those who love details
2. And one for those who like to keep it simple

As we go through the first one circle or mark things that stand out to you.

Isaac Watts, the famous hymn writer, described prayer as;
“Prayer is a word which has broad meaning in Scripture. It includes not only a request for mercies, but it denotes the address of a creature on earth to God in heaven about everything that concerns his God, his neighbor or himself, in this world or the world to come. It is the conversation which God allows us to maintain with himself above, while we are here below.”¹

¹ Isaac Watts, *A Guide to Prayer* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2019), 9.

1. Adress
2. creature on earth
3. God in heaven
4. Maintain with him in heaven

John Bunyan’s defines prayer as: write down Bunyans discriptors

“Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or according to the Word, for the good of the church, with submission, in faith, to the will of God.”²

What are the seven descriptors of prayer, according to Bunyan?

1. It is a sincere;
2. Sensible;
3. An affectionate,
4. pouring out of the soul to God, through Christ;
5. By the strength or assistance of the Spirit;
6. For such things as God hath promised, or, according to his word;
7. For the good of the church;
8. Submission in faith to the will of God.

John Piper views prayer as “intentionally conveying a message to God.”³

Intentionally Conveying a Message

- We use intentional because every day, we communicate things to God unintentionally through our words, actions, and attitudes that are not prayer
 - We commicate through disobedience, and even prayerlessness
- We are not just talking to God “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom 8:26).⁴ Some prayer is without words.
- We are also not communicating with God because that might imply two-way communication.

This was less of an issue for many a 100 years ago but it is now common to hear someone say they heard from God.

God no longer communicates as he once did since Scripture is complete. Which means there is no more need for new revelation.

Two verses that will help us think through how we convey our message to God.

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Mat 6:7).

² John Bunyan, *Prayer*, Puritan Paperbacks (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 24.

³ John Piper, “Pray Like This: Hallowed Be Your Name,” *Desiring God*, December 30, 2007, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/pray-like-this-hallowed-be-your-name>.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the English Standard Version.

“Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few (Ecc 5:2).

We could have a whole lesson on these two passages. But lets keep it simple.

What do we need to be aware of in our prayers based on these two verses?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

1. Heap up words
2. Empty phrases
3. They will be heard for their many words
4. Do not be rash
5. Hasty to utter words (Why is it an issue for the heart to be hasty in uttering words?)
6. Let your words be few
7. God is in heaven
8. You are on earth

Jesus says of the Scribes

“who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers” (Mark 12:40).

Bible commentator William Hendriksen wrote, “The *motive* must be kept in mind. Pagans pray on and on because they imagine that the longer and the louder they pray, the greater also will be their chance of success in receiving what they desire.”⁵

Humans have a tendency for repetition.

- Elijah and priests of Baal in 1 Kings 18:25-29
- Tibetan Buddhists turn cylinders inscribed with prayers
- The Rosary may also be a repetition

Do we use words to try to badger God into answering?

Do we have to demand God’s attention?

Do we think that God is unaware of our needs?

Do we think that quantity of words can replace quality in prayer?

What do we need to do on the positive side once we know what not to do?

Give some examples of how we should pray based on Scripture

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

⁵ William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, Baker’s New Testament Commentary, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1973), comm. on Matthew 6:7, e-Sword.

Biblical Passage on Prayer

Jesus teaching in Matthew

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Mat 7:7-11)

Context of this passage (can anyone give me some of the highlights of this sermon).
The Sermon on the Mount can be viewed as a mountain to scale.

Chapter 5:3 Blessed are the poor in Spirit (Fundamental Characteristic). The remaining attitudes Mourning, Meek, Hunger and Thirst, Merciful, Pure, Peacemaker, Persecuted. Salt and light, Anger, Lust, Divorce, Oaths, love your enemy, give to the needy, Treasures in heaven, don't be anxious, judging others,

This passage is bookended by Matthew 7:13

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Mat 7:13-14)

however, as we study it we realize the impossibility of the task.

Seeing the impossibility of the climb we find in this passage seven encouragements to pray.

- 1) Jesus invites us to ask in prayer
- 2) Jesus makes a promise to us when we pray
 - a. Ask – Given
 - b. Seek – Find
 - c. Knock – Opened
- 3) God makes himself available
 - a. Ask – If your father is near, you simply need to ask
 - b. Seek – Father is not near, and we must seek him.
 - c. Knocks – Father is in another room with the door closed, so knock.
- 4) Everyone who asks receives
 - a. Who is everyone? – every child of God.
- 5) Our Heavenly Father is far superior to any earthly father
 - a. how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things.
- 6) We can trust that God is good because he has made us his children
 - a. We are evil and God has already made us his children.
- 7) The cross provides the foundation for prayer
 - a. Because we are evil, the cross allows us to become children of God.

J.I. Packer, in referring to the above passage, makes a statement that will challenge many, It is important for us frankly to recognize that there is no such thing as unanswered prayer from a child of God. That, of course, is a tremendous thing to say, and some would hesitate to say it; yet Jesus' words just quoted show that it would be sheer unbelief not to say it. But (and the but is rather significant) God,

our heavenly Father, perfect as he is in wisdom, reserves the right to answer our pleas for help in the best way and at the best time.⁶

Does that mean that God will answer every prayer when you pray?

No, if that were the case, you would be God.

Jesus states that God is a good father, and will not give a stone or a snake in place of bread or fish.

We will receive those things that are good, or put another way

The salvation of our souls

Our perfection

Things that bring us closer to God

What are the practical implications?

Does your life and your time in prayer reflect what you say you believe?

If not why not?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Handout 3x5 Card

If you could have any two questions on prayer answered, what would you ask?

Examples of Prayer

Psalms 4 as a prayer

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of David. Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer! O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah. But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him. Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah. Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD. There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!" You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety (Ps 4:1-8).

Puritan Prayer

Meeting God

Great God, in public and private, in sanctuary and home, may my life be steeped in prayer, filled with the spirit of grace and supplication, each prayer perfumed with the incense of atoning blood. Help me, defend me, until from praying ground I pass to the realm of unceasing praise. Urged by my need, invited by Your promises,

⁶ J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 55.

called by Your Spirit, I enter Your presence, worshipping You with godly fear, awed by Your majesty, greatness, glory, but encouraged by Your love.

I am all poverty as well as all guilt, having nothing of my own with which to repay You, but I bring Jesus to You in the arms of faith, pleading His righteousness to offset my iniquities, rejoicing that He will weigh down the scales for me, and satisfy Your justice. I bless You that great sin draws out great grace, that, although the lest sin deserves infinite punishment because done against an infinite God, yet there is mercy for me, for where guilt is most terrible, there Your mercy in Christ is most free and deep. Bless me by revealing to me more of His saving merits, by causing Your goodness to pass before me, by speaking peace to my contrite heart; strengthen me to give You no rest until Christ shall reign supreme within me in every thought, word, and deed, in a faith that purifies the heart, overcomes the world, works by love, fastens me to You, and ever clings to the cross.⁷

How could what you learned today change how you pray?

Putting Prayer into Practice

Writing out your Prayer

Spend a few minutes writing out a prayer based on what you have learned today. If you have things in your life you need prayer for think about how you might pray for that in your prayer.

Homework

Seek to spend an extra 5 minutes praying each day. This should be time dedicated to prayer.

Ask the Lord to help you to prayer (Rom 8:26-27)

Thank God that he hears your prayers (Ps 4:3) and that he answers (Matt 7:7-11).

“But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mat 6:6).

Collect 3x5 Cards

⁷ Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 148.

Prayer Class Week 2 Who Do We Pray To

Offer new 3x5 Cards to those with additional questions or new people in class

Survey for anyone who did not get one filled out in the first class

Ask if anyone can recall what was discussed in the previous class

Recap last week Matthew 7:7-11.

Elon Musk ATM card illustration

Four questions we want to deal with today

1. Who do you Pray to?
2. Who is the God you pray to?
3. Where is the God you pray to?
4. Do you know the one you pray to?

Book recommendation

A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*
J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

Open in Prayer

To Whom do you take your Requests

1. Who Do We Pray To? God!

We pray to God, and more specifically, we pray to the God revealed in the Bible.

A.W. Tozer, in his famous quote, stated, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”⁸

2. Who is the God you pray to?

- a. Do we pray to the triune God of the Bible, or have our ideas of God led us to something less.

Three verses that help us with who we are praying too.

- a. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’ (Exo 34:6-7)
- b. “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place.” (Isa 57:15a)
- c. “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father” (Eph 3:14).

➤ The Sovereign of God of the Universe

⁸ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperOne, 1978), 1.

“Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’” (Isa 46:9-10).

If God is sovereign, why do we need to pray?

“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask” (Matt 6:8).

“Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear” (Isa 65:24).

- Does prayer change things?
- Does prayer change us?
- Does prayer change God?

1. Christians are commanded to pray
 - a) James 5:16: “Pray for one another.”
 - b) 1 Thessalonians 5:17: “Pray without ceasing.”
 - c) Luke 18:1 “And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.
 - d) Luke 22:40: “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”
 - e) Luke 18:1: “And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”
 - f) Matthew 6:9: “Pray then like this.”
2. Prayer is part of building relationship with God.
 - a) Jer 29:12-13 “Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”
 - b) Isa 55:6 “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”
 - c) 1 John 1:3 “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”
3. Prayer allows access to things we might otherwise not receive.
 - a) James 4:2: “You do not have, because you do not ask.”
 - b) Matt 20:32: “And stopping, Jesus called them and said, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”
4. God sovereignly inspires and plans our prayers
 - a) Luke 22:32 I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when [not if] you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.
 - b) Philippians 2:12–13 “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”
 - c) Isaiah 14:24 “The LORD of hosts has sworn: “As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.”
 - d) Romans 8:26-27 (26) Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit

himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (27)
And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of
God.

- i. groans are not audible and are inexpressible in words
- ii. groans caused by physical and spiritual weakness
- iii. groans originate with the Spirit whose will is always entirely
in line with God the Father

Marshall Segal wrote, “His will *will* be done whether *I* pray or not, but
his will *will not* be done without prayer, because he has chosen to make
prayer indispensable... The absolute sovereignty of God — over all the
kingdoms of the earth and over every detail of our lives — is the hope
and foundation for our praying.”⁹

➤ **God is also our Father** (Getting the balance right)

God as Father in the Old Testament – Father of Israel Isa. 64:8–9; Deut.
14:1–

God as Father in the New Testament – John 20:17 Gal 4:6-7

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you
have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba!
Father!” (Rom 8:15)

Like a child in need, the Christian cries out to their father.

d. “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name’”
(Matt 6:9).

Many of the problems we have with prayer come when we fail to understand
the balance in this verse. Did you also realize that the Lord’s prayer is
corporate?

3. Where is the God you pray to?

- a. **God is not in an object of worship**, John 4:24 – God is Spirit
- b. **God is not something sought within the person** Colossians 3:1–2 -
seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of
God. **2** Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on
earth.
 - i. Biblical spirituality
 - ii. Mysticism
- c. **God is in heaven**, The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all. (Psa 103:19)

A.W. Tozer wrote about the presence of God,

⁹ Marshall Segal, “What Difference Will Prayer Make? Why the Sovereignty of God Brings
Us to Our Knees,” *Desiring God*, January 13, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-difference-will-prayer-make>.

This truth is to the convinced Christian a source of deep comfort in sorrow and of steadfast assurance in all the varied experiences of his life. To him “the practice of the presence of God” consists not of protecting an imaginary object from within his own mind and then seeking to realize its presence; it is rather to recognize the real presence of the One whom all sound theology declares to be already there, an objective entity, existing apart from any apprehension of Him on the part of His creatures. The resultant experience is not visionary but real.¹⁰

4. Do you know the one you pray to?

J.I. Packer wrote, “One can know a great deal about God without much knowledge of him.”¹¹

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39).

What are the practical implications?

How does your view of God change your prayer life?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Hezekiah’s Prayer for Deliverance

And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire. For they were no gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD (Isa 37:15-20).

What can we learn for this passage?

Puritan Prayer

O FOUNTAIN OF ALL GOOD,
Destroy in me every lofty thought,
Break pride to pieces and scatter it to the winds,
Annihilate each clinging shred of self-righteousness,
Implant in me true lowliness of spirit,
Abase me to self-loathing and self-abhorrence,
Open in me a fount of penitential tears,

¹⁰ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 76.

¹¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 20th anniv. ed. (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1993),

Break me, then bind me up;
 Thus will my heart be a prepared dwelling for my God;
 Then can the Father take up his abode in me,
 Then can the blessed Jesus come with healing in his touch,
 Then can the Holy Spirit descend in sanctifying grace;
 O Holy Trinity, three Persons and one God,
 inhabit me, a temple consecrated to thy glory.
 When thou art present, evil cannot abide;
 In thy fellowship is fullness of joy,
 Beneath thy smile is peace of conscience,
 By thy side no fears disturb,
 no apprehensions banish rest of mind,
 With thee my heart shall bloom with fragrance;
 Make me meet, through repentance, for thine indwelling.
 Nothing exceeds thy power,
 Nothing is too great for thee to do,
 Nothing too good for thee to give.
 Infinite is thy might, boundless thy love,
 limitless thy grace, glorious thy saving name.
 Let angels sing for
 sinners repenting,
 prodigals restored,
 backsliders reclaimed,
 Satan's captives released,
 blind eyes opened,
 broken hearts bound up,
 the despondent cheered,
 the self-righteous stripped,
 the formalist driven from a refuge of lies,
 the ignorant enlightened,
 and saints built up in their holy faith.
 I ask great things of a great God.¹²

J.I. Packer writes “First, we must recognize how much we lack knowledge of God. We must learn to measure ourselves, not by our knowledge about God, not by our gifts and responsibilities in the church, but by how we pray and what goes on in our hearts.”¹³

How could what you learned today change how you pray?

Putting Prayer into Practice

Prayer Requests

Writing out your Prayer

¹² Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, 6.

¹³ Packer, *Knowing God*, 32.

Spend a few minutes writing out a prayer based on what you have learned today. If you have things in your life you need prayer for think about how you might pray for that in your prayer.

Homework

Seek to spend an extra 10 minutes praying each day. This could be at one time or 5 min twice a day.

Closing Prayer

Prayer Class Week 3 How We Pray

Welcome

Ask if anyone can recall what was discussed in the previous class

Book recommendation

Don Whitney: *Praying the Bible*

Open in Prayer

Prayer and Scripture cannot be separated. Scripture drives prayer because it is the source of the knowledge of God and his promises.

D. A. Carson states, “The more we learn about God and his ways and his perspectives, the more we improve our grasp not only of elemental theology but of prayer as well.”¹⁴

Name of God and the attribute related to it

Name: El Shaddai (Lord God Almighty) **Attribute:** Omnipotence (unlimited power)
“Sovereignty and omnipotence must go together. One cannot exist without the other. To reign, God must have power, and to reign sovereignly, He must have all power. And that is what omnipotent means, having all power.”¹⁵

Name: Jehovah Jireh (the Lord will provide) **Attribute:** Goodness

Name: Jehovah (*Jehovah* is derived from the Hebrew word *Havah* meaning “to be” or “to exist.” It also suggests “to become” or specifically “to become known”) **Attribute:** Omnipresent

“One of two things causes a man to change his mind and reverse his plans: want of foresight to anticipate everything, or lack of power to execute them. But as God is both omniscient and omnipotent there is never any need for Him to revise His decrees.”¹⁶

Invocation in our prayers

Isaac Watts writes that an invocation to God may include the following¹⁷

- “Mention of one or more of the names or titles of God”
- “A declaration of our desire and design to worship him”
- “A desire of his assistance and acceptance”

Verses that come to mind when thinking about that attribute of God

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thinking about who God is and what he has done should lead us to prayer

Paul connects his prayer in Ephesians to what God has done.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 76.

¹⁵ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 65.

¹⁶ Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Attributes of God*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 39.

¹⁷ Watts, *A Guide to Prayer*, 11-12.

“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers” (Eph 1:15-16)

How we pray is often as important as what we pray.

We talked about the postures of prayer in week one, but now we want to look at some other attitudes of prayer.

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

1. Praying at all times
2. Keep alert
3. Perseverance
4. Supplication for all the saints

James tells us that “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth” (Jas 5:17).

There is one statement that we should all pay close attention to
“was a man with a nature like ours”

We want to briefly look at three parables that speak to prayer.

The Friend at Midnight Luke 11:5-8

1. There is a Need
2. There is Friend who can Provide
3. The person must be Persistent in order to Receive

The Persistent Widow in Luke 18:1-8

1. There is a Need
2. There is Unbeliever who can Provide
3. The person must be Persistent in order to Receive

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector Luke 18:9-14

1. The Pharisee prayed about his Acomplishments
2. The tax collector prayers about his failures
3. The one who recognized his sin went away Justified

Why do we pray fervently

Eric Alexander writes,

In the Christian church over the years, we have turned the truth upside down, and commonly speak of ‘praying for the work’—the implication being that prayer is an additional ingredient to our Christian service. The truth is that prayer is the real work, and apart from it all other work is in vain. The reason for that is quite simple. It is that essentially this work in which we are engaged is God’s work, not man’s.¹⁸

Humility is a necessary requirement for prayer.

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

¹⁸ Eric J. Alexander, *Prayer: A Biblical Perspective* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 40.

Contrite means something that is broken or crushed. David helps explain what that might look like. “O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (Psa 131:1-2).

Isa 57:15 For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Isa 66:2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

One of the great helps in prayer is Scripture itself.

Praying Scripture helps prevent prayers from becoming repetitive and also helps prevent the mind from wandering.

You need to understand its Meaning to pray it. Make sure you understand the meaning of the passage you want to pray. Don't just pray it because you think it sounds good or because you don't know what to pray. We are praying is the meaning of texts, not just words.

The early Church prayed Scripture as seen Acts 4:24 which is from Psalms 2

Praying Scripture before you read your Bible

- ❖ Incline my heart to your testimonies (Ps 119:36).
- ❖ Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law (Ps 119:18).
- ❖ Unite my heart to fear your name (Ps 86:11).
- ❖ Satisfy us [me] in the morning with your steadfast love (Ps 90:14).

Praying the Bible

Psa 23:1-6 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. (3) He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (4) Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Ways to pray the Scripture¹⁹

1. Lord, you are my good shepherd
2. Lord, help me to follow you and not to wander
3. Help my family, shepherd those who are yours and those that are not, draw them in
4. Help the pastors at my church who are under-shepherds

¹⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 29-30.

1Co 13:4-8 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant (5) or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; (6) it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. (7) Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (8) Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

Putting Prayer into Practice

Psa 23:1-6

What can we learn for this passage?

Writing out your Prayer

Spent a few minutes writing out a prayer based on what you have learned today while keeping Psalms 23 in mind. If you have things in your life you need prayer for think about how you might pray for that in your prayer.

Puritan Prayer

O FOUNTAIN OF ALL GOOD,
Destroy in me every lofty thought,
Break pride to pieces and scatter it to the winds, Annihilate each
clinging shred of self-righteousness,
Implant in me true lowliness of spirit,
Abase me to self-loathing and self-aborrence,
Open in me a fount of penitential tears,
Break me, then bind me up;
Thus will my heart be a prepared dwelling for my God;
Then can the Father take up his abode in me,
Then can the blessed Jesus come with healing in his touch,
Then can the Holy Spirit descend in
sanctifying grace;
O Holy Trinity, three Persons and one God,
inhabit me, a temple consecrated to thy glory.
When thou art present, evil cannot abide;
In thy fellowship is fullness of joy,
Beneath thy smile is peace of conscience,
By thy side no fears disturb,
no apprehensions banish rest of mind,
With thee my heart shall bloom with fragrance;
Make me meet, through repentance,
for thine indwelling.
Nothing exceeds thy power,
Nothing is too great for thee to do,
Nothing too good for thee to give.
Infinite is thy might, boundless thy love,
limitless thy grace, glorious thy saving name.
Let angels sing for sinners repenting,
prodigals restored,
backsliders reclaimed,
Satan's captives released,
blind eyes opened,
broken hearts bound up,
the despondent cheered,
the self-righteous stripped,

the formalist driven from a refuge of lies,
the ignorant enlightened,
and saints built up in their holy faith.
I ask great things of a great God.²⁰

How could what you learned today, change how you pray?

Praying individually

This week seek to spend an extra 10 minutes praying each day. You can do it at one time or two 5 minute prayers. This should be time dedicated to prayer.

Close the class with prayer.

²⁰ Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, 6.

Prayer Class Week 4 What We Pray

Welcome

Ask if anyone can recall what was discussed in the previous class

Recap previous week

Book recommendation

Martin Luther, *Little Prayer Book*

Open in Prayer

What are some of the reasons people pray?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What types of prayers do these represent?

Different types of prayer

Adoration – Prayer that gives honor or worship to God

“God merits all the adoration that we can give him, for the beauty, the goodness and the faithfulness that he shows us in so many different ways... We praise him because of who and what he is.”²¹ God is worthy of worship and praise not only because of what he has done but simply because of who he is.

Intercession - Making a request to God on behalf of someone else

Petition – Making a request to God and because of a need

Confession – Prayer that admits sin to God

Thanksgiving – Thanking God for all he has done

How many of you have a model or outline for prayer

1. ACTS model

Why do you pray?

Confession

Why is Confession Important?

“But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isa 59:2).

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (Jas 5:16).

“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psa 66:18).

Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling

²¹ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 31.

block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols. “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations (Ezek 14:3-6).

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).
Why is Confession Important in Prayer?

1. Confessing that one is a sinner in need of a savior is the first prayer.
2. Admit that we have sinned and been disobedient. (1 John 1:9)
 - a. Insincere confession downplays sin, excuses it, or blames others.
 - b. “Obedience is oriented to God victory is oriented toward self.”²²
3. Godly grief leads to repentance. 2 Corinthians 7:10-11
 - a. Action must be taken to turn from sin. Colossians 3:5
 - b. We need help to put to death the things of the flesh.

Exodus 20:3-6

You shall have no other gods before me. (4) “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, (6) but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments (Ex 20:3-6).

1. **There is nothing in creation by which God is represented (Deut 4:14).**
2. **Images dishonor God because they will obscure his glory.**

John Calvin wrote, “A true image of God, is not to be found in all the world; and hence... His glory is defiled, and His truth corrupted by the lie, whenever He is set before our eyes in a visible form... Therefore, to devise any image of God is itself impious; because by this corruption His majesty is adulterated, and He is figured to be other than He is.”²³

2. **Images mislead because they convey false or incomplete ideas about God.**

Packer, “How often do we hear this sort of thing: ‘I like to think of God as the great Architect (or Mathematician or Artist).’ ‘I don’t think of God as a Judge; I like to think of him simply as a Father.’ We know from experience how often remarks of this kind serve as the prelude to a denial of something that the Bible tells us about God.”²⁴

²² Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2020), 14.

²³ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), comm. on Exod 20:4, Accordance Bible Software.

²⁴ Packer, *Knowing God*, 47.

Martin Luther gives four points on using the second commandment to pray.²⁵

1. God’s name is to be honored, and one must humbly invoke the name of God.
2. God has revealed himself and his name for which we must be thankful.
3. Confess that we have not honored his name or been ungrateful for his gift.
4. Ask for strength to obey the command and to honor his name.

What ideas could you use from Luther’s example in your prayers?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thanksgiving

“What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor 4:7).

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:15-17).

We thank God for what he has done and what he will do.

Thankfulness in Prayer

1. We are commanded to be grateful
2. We are not naturally grateful.
3. We give thanks to God because he has shown us love and mercy that we do not deserve.

We are thankful because even the good we do is only because of him.

What are you grateful for?

1. _____
2. _____

Pauls Framework in Prayers

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

(Rom 1:8-10)

When we look at Pauls prayers in the Epistles we see a framework built around thankful for “signs of grace.” Which are things like faith, love, and perseverance. Too often, thankfulness is forgotten in an age of instant gratification.

What do you most often give thanks for?

²⁵ Martin Luther, *Little Prayer Book, 1522, and A Simple Way to Pray, 1535*, ed. Mary Jane Haemig and Eric Lund, Annotated Luther Study ed. (Baltimore: Fortress Press, 2016), 268.

D. A. Carson writes, “The unvarnished truth is that what we most frequently give thanks for betrays what we most highly value.”²⁶

Why we pray tells us a lot about where our heart is. Sermon of the Mount Jesus reminds us “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mat 6:21).

Prayer

Psalm of Confession

Psa 51:1-4 **To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.** Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

Psalm of Thanksgiving

Psa 111:1-8 Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and merciful. He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

What can we learn for this passage?

Puritan Prayer

HOLY LORD,

I have sinned times without number,
and been guilty of pride and unbelief,
of failure to find thy mind in thy Word,
of neglect to seek thee in my daily life.

My transgressions and short-comings present me with a list of accusations,
But I bless thee that they will not stand against me,
for all have been laid on Christ;

Go on to subdue my corruptions,
and grant me grace to live above them.

Let not the passions of the flesh nor lustings of the mind bring my spirit into
subjection,

but do thou rule over me in liberty and power.

I thank thee that many of my prayers have been refused —

I have asked amiss and do not have,

I have prayed from lusts and been rejected,

I have longed for Egypt and been given a wilderness.

Go on with thy patient work,
answering ‘no’ to my wrongful prayers,
and fitting me to accept it.

²⁶ Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 23.

Purge me from every false desire,
every base aspiration,
everything contrary to thy rule.
I thank thee for thy wisdom and thy love,
for all the acts of discipline to which I am subject,
for sometimes putting me into the furnace to refine my gold and remove my dross.
No trial is so hard to bear as a sense of sin.
If thou shouldst give me choice to live in pleasure and keep my sins,
or to have them burnt away with trial,
give me sanctified affliction.
Deliver me from every evil habit,
every accretion of former sins,
everything that dims the brightness of thy grace in me,
everything that prevents me taking delight in thee.
Then I shall bless thee, God of Jeshurun,
for helping me to be upright.²⁷

How could what you learned today change how you pray?

Putting Prayer into Practice

Writing out your Prayer

Spend a few minutes writing out a prayer based on what you have learned today while keeping Psalm 51 in mind. If you have things in your life you need prayer for think about how you might pray for that in your prayer.

Small Group Prayer

Gather in Small groups and spend the next 10 minutes praying either what you have written or a prayer of intercession for another.

Homework

Seek to spend an extra 15 minutes praying each day. This could be at one time or 5 min three times a day.

Closing Prayer

²⁷ Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, 77.

Prayer Class Week 5
What we Pray
Petition, Intercession, Lament

Welcome

Week 1- What is prayer?

Week 2 - Who do we pray to?

Week 3 – How and What We Pray

Week 4 - What We Pray, Confession and Thanksgiving

This week - What We Pray, Petition, Intercession, Lament

Ask if anyone can recall what was discussed in the previous class

Book recommendation

George Müller: *The Autobiography Of George Müller*

Open in Prayer

Old Jewish grandmother illustration

George Müller,

Now, if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, obtained, without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan-House: there would be something which, with the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God. This, then, was *the primary reason*, for establishing the Orphan-House. . . . The *first and primary object* of the work was, (and still is) that God might be magnified by the fact, that the orphans under my care are provided, with all they need, only by prayer and faith, without any one being asked by me or my fellow-laborers, whereby it may be seen, that God is Faithful still, and hears prayers still.²⁸

Book recommendation: George Müller: *The Autobiography Of George Müller*

Bio:

George Müller was born in 1805. In October 1830, he gave up his minister's salary only weeks after getting married. Müller installed a box at the back of the church so "that whoever had a desire to give something toward my support could put his offering into the box."²⁹ Without ever asking for funds, Müller provided for more than ten thousand orphans, and "he testified that he knew of at least 50,000 specific answers to prayer."³⁰

Lord's Prayer

²⁸ Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller*, 1:105.

²⁹ George Müller, *The Autobiography Of George Müller* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985), 37.

³⁰ Müller, *The Autobiography Of George Müller*, 240.

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Mat 6:9-13)

Eric Alexander points out some helpful lessons from the Lord’s Prayer³¹

The first half of the Lord’s Prayer is focused on God

1. His nature as Father
2. His name
3. His kingdom
4. His Will

Praying in line with the Lord’s Prayer

1. Pray for the hallowing of God’s name
 - a. Does not mean to make his name holy; it is holy, and nothing can be added to that holiness.
 - b. We ask that we might reverence, glorify, and honor his name.
 - c. Paul writes, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2Co 3:18)
 - d. J.I. Packer, “Just as this petition is the controlling thought of the Lord’s Prayer as a whole so the longing to see it fulfilled should be the controlling desire of the heart whenever God’s children pray.”³²
 - e. R. C. Sproul’s video series “the Holiness of God.”
2. Pray for the coming of his kingdom
 - a. Asking that the Lord would have ever-greater control of our lives and the world that he has made. (Rom 7:15, For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate).
3. Pray for the doing of God’s will
 - a. We are asking that God’s will, which is done perfectly in heaven, would also be done on earth.
 - b. For God’s will to be done on earth, people must come to know Jesus.
4. Pray for physical and material needs
 - a. There is no need for which we are not completely dependent on God.
5. Pray for Spiritual needs
 - a. Paul in Ephesian 1:16-19 provides some examples:

³¹ Alexander, *Prayer*, 20-22.

³² Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 162.

- i. Increase in the knowledge of God (Eph 1:16)
- ii. Understanding of the call of God (Eph 18)
- iii. To understand something of God's power (Eph 1:19)

6. Pray for divine protection

- a. "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the" devil (Mat 4:1).
- b. "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1Pe 1:6-7).
- c. The delivering from evil is needed because "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1Pe 5:8).

Intercession and Petition

The Puritan Stephen Charnock writes that Christ teaches us the manner of praying,

"which should consist of arguments for God's glory and our happiness: not that arguments move God to do that which he is not willing of himself to do for us (as Christ's pressing arguments to his Father was not to inform God of the necessity of what he prayed for), as though the infinitely wise God needed information, or the infinitely loving God needed persuasion, but it is for strengthening our faith in him."³³

It should be noted that
The Lord's Prayer is in the plural and not singular

Does God answer prayer?

Mark 11

23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

John 14:12-14

12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

John 15:7 "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

³³ Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865), 8.

It will be done if you Abide and you Ask

You must abide in Christ and his word must abide in you
The ask here is an imperative or command

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4:6).
“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us” (1Jn 5:14).

Each passage had some requirements for prayer to be answered

1. Abide: John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
2. Do not be anxious: Matthew 6:25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”
3. According to his will: 1 Thessalonians 4:3 “For this is the will of God, your sanctification”

Do you believe these passages? Is this truth real to you!

It is often the case that we pray much when it comes to people and their needs or we pray and give thanks but never ask specifically for God to move in people’s lives. The blind man had been crying out loud repeatedly, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” The cry had reached the ear of the Lord. He knew what the man wanted and was ready to grant it to him. But before He did it, He asked him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” He wanted to hear not only the general petition for mercy, but the distinct expression of what the man’s desire was that day. Until he verbalized it, he was not healed.³⁴

J. I. Packer wrote, “When the biblical writers call God good, they are thinking in general of all those moral qualities which prompt his people to call him perfect, and in particular of the generosity which moves them to call him merciful and gracious and to speak of his love.”³⁵

Prayer of Lament

The Hebrew word for Psalms means “praise.”

Lament is one of the most common psalms in the book

Psa 13:1-6 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? (2) How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (3) Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, (4) lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,” lest my

³⁴ Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981), 44.

³⁵ Packer, *Knowing God*, 161.

foes rejoice because I am shaken. (5) But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. (6) I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Theological Reasons for Prayers of Lament³⁶

1. Lament psalms are quoted in the New Testament (Ps 69)
2. Jesus prayed lament psalms
3. Part of a lament psalm is found in Rev 6:9-10 (dead martyrs in heaven, Ps 94:3, 79:10)

Practical Reasons for Prayers of Lament³⁷

1. People do not all come to church full of joy
2. Praying lament psalms can help one learn to be sympathetic
3. Can be prayed on behalf of those who are suffering

One of the most practical reasons for lament is that you are suffering and need to cry out to God.

Psalm 27

Of David. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD. Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in. Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence. I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD! (Ps 27:1-14)

What can we learn for this passage?

Putting Prayer into Practice

Write out a prayer of petition and intercession.

³⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising With the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 45.

³⁷ Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 47.

Spend a few minutes writing out a prayer based on what you have learned today while keeping Psalms 27 in mind. If you have things in your life you need prayer for think about how you might pray for that in your prayer.

Small Group Prayer

Gather in Small groups and spend the next 10 minutes praying either what you have written or a prayer of intercession for another.

Puritan Prayer

Morning Needs

O God the author of all good, I come to You for the grace another day will require for its duties and events. I step out into a wicked world; I carry about with me an evil heart. I know that without You I can do nothing, that everything with which I shall be concerned, however harmless in itself, may prove an occasion of sin or folly, unless I am kept by Your power. Hold me up and I shall be safe.

Preserve my understanding from subtilty of error, my affections from love of idols, my character from stain of vice, my profession from every form of evil. May I engage in nothing in which I cannot implore Your blessing, and in which I cannot invite Your inspection. Prosper me in all lawful undertakings, or prepare me for disappointments. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny You and say, Who is the Lord? or be poor, and steal, and take Your name in vain.

May every creature be made good to me by prayer and Your will. Teach me how to use the world and not abuse it, to improve my talents, to redeem my time, to walk in wisdom toward those without, and in kindness to those within, to do good to all men, and especially to my fellow Christians. And to You be the glory.³⁸

How could what you learned today change how you pray?

Homework

Seek to spend an extra 15 minutes praying each day. This could be at one time or 5 min three times a day.

Close the class with prayer.

³⁸ Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, 118.

Prayer Class Week 6 Holy Spirit in Prayer

Welcome

Book recommendation

J. C. Ryle: *A Call to Prayer*

Open in Prayer

Ask if anyone can recall what was discussed in the previous class

Last week we looked at Intercession, Petition, and Lament

The Lords Prayer, “Hallowed be your name”

1. There is nothing above this request
2. This is the focus of all the rest of the petitions. Your kingdom come that your name be hallowed, give us our daily bread so that your name may be hallowed, our sins are forgiven that your name may be hallowed,
3. We don’t hallow God’s name because, there is nothing higher to achieve.

Praying for Evangelism

Technically this would fall under a prayer of Intercession - Making a request to God on behalf of someone else.

We also touched on this in the Lord’s Prayer when it talks about “your kingdom come”

Prayer is a vital part of evangelism.

Three areas of prayer regarding evangelism

1. Carrying out the Great Commission
 - a. Matt 28:19-20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
 - b. Who does this passage apply to?
 - c. What is required to carry this out?
 - d. Do you need help?
2. Workers to do the work
 - a. Matt 9:37-38 “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; (38) therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’”
 - b. Is there a timeless truth we can find in this passage?
 - c. What type of prayer should we pray?
3. Speaking to the unregenerate
 - a. “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).

Illustration - Go into a cemetery and calling dead people to rise.
Evangelism is preaching to dead people

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).

The Greek word here νεκρός means dead, As pastor Scott has said it does not mean near to death or deathly ill but dead.

How do you talk to dead people?

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live (Ezek 37:1-5).

Prayer is vital to evangelism because we need help.
That help comes from the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit and Prayer

Let start with thinking about some common prayer requests.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Let's break these requests into different categories.

1. Medical
2. Financial
3. Personal
4. Spiritual

Illustration of a greater need found in Luke 5:17-20.

A paralyzed man is brought to Jesus.

1. Who brought him?
2. How did he get to Jesus?
3. What did they want Jesus to do?
4. What did Jesus do?
5. Is that what they wanted him to do?

D. A. Carson writes

If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, He would have sent an economist. If he had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent us a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, he would have sent us a politician. If he had perceived that our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death, and he sent us a Savior.³⁹

The Holy Spirit helps us in prayer

Rom 8:26-27 "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for

³⁹ D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 109.

words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Our Weakness

The weakness or infirmity is not limited to just the person’s physical frailness. Paul also uses weakness (ἀσθένεια) to describe the weakness of the flesh regarding temptation and sin (Rom 6:19).

1. The Spirit helps us in our physical frailness
2. And in our weakness of the flesh regarding temptation and sin
3. The Spirit helps us in our weakness of prayer
4. We groan, guided by the Spirit (this probably is not the Spirit praying but Spirit guided)

Greek god illustrations on living forever

“because of our imperfect perspectives, finite minds, human frailties, and spiritual limitations, we are not able to pray in absolute consistency with God’s will. Many times we are not even aware that spiritual needs exist.”⁴⁰

Cry out for greater manifestations of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Puritan George Smeaton wrote,

And no more mischievous and misleading theory could be propounded, nor any one more dishonoring to the Holy Spirit, than the principle that because the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the Church has no need, and no warrant, to pray any more for the effusion [outpouring] of the Spirit of God. On the contrary, the more the Church asks the Spirit and waits for His communication, the more she receives.⁴¹

Johnathan Edwards,

The Scriptures do not only direct and encourage us, in general, to pray for the Holy Spirit above all things else; but it is the expressly revealed will of God, that his church should be very much in prayer for that glorious outpouring of the Spirit that is to be in the latter days, and the things that shall be accomplished by it.⁴²

Charles Spurgeon,

Did not we hear some time ago from certain wise brethren that we were never to pray for the Spirit? I think I heard it said often, “We have the Holy Spirit, and therefore we are not to pray for it.” Like that other declaration of certain of the same brotherhood, that we have pardon of sin, and are not to pray for it, just as if we were never to pray for what we have! If we have life we are to pray that we have it more abundantly. If we have pardon in one respect we are to ask for a fuller sense of it; and if we have the Holy Spirit so that we are quickened, and saved, we do not ask for him in that capacity, but we ask for his power in other directions, and for his grace in other forms. I do not go before God now and say, “Lord, I am a dead sinner, quicken me by thy Spirit,” for I trust I am quickened of his Spirit; but being quickened I now cry, “Lord, let not the life thou hast given me ebb down till it

⁴⁰ MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, 466.

⁴¹ Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 288-89.

⁴² Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1:290.

becomes very feeble, but give me of thy Spirit that the life within me may become strong and mighty, and may subdue all the power of death within my members, that I may put forth the vigour and energy which come from thyself through the Spirit.” O you that have the Spirit, you are the very men to pray that you may experience more of his matchless operations and gracious influences, and in all the benign sanctity of his indwelling may seek that yet more and more you may know him. You have this as your encouragement, that God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him. Ever since certain brethren gave up asking for the Holy Spirit they have not had it, and they have gone aside into many inventions; if they will not ask they shall not have, but be it yours and mine to wait humbly and patiently upon the Lord that he may daily give us of his Spirit.⁴³

Matt 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The word “poor” is the Greek word πτωχός, which carries the idea of a beggar as seen in its use in the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-21).

“They are called blessed as being poor in spirit, not in spirituality but “with respect to” their spirit; that is, they are the ones who have become convinced of their spiritual poverty. They have been made conscious of their misery and want.”⁴⁴

“Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isa 66:1-2).

Paul’s Prayer in Ephesians 3

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:14-21).

Important points to see in the passage

1. I bow my knees before the Father
 - a. Bow before God of heaven
 - b. Also, recognizing God as Father
2. Strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being
3. Rooted and grounded in love
4. To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge
5. You may be filled with all the fullness of God

⁴³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Right Replies to Right Requests No. 959,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 16 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 620-21.

⁴⁴ Hendriksen, *Matthew*, comm. on Matt 5:3.

6. God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think
7. The power at work within us
8. To him (God) be glory

Puritan Prayer

Spiritual Helps

Eternal Father, it is amazing love, that You have sent Your Son to suffer in my stead, that You have added the Spirit to teach, comfort, guide, that You have allowed the ministry of angels to wall me round; all heaven subserves the welfare of a poor worm. Permit Your unseen servants to be ever active on my behalf, and to rejoice when grace expands in me. Suffer them never to rest until my conflict is over, and I stand victorious on salvation's shore.

Grant that my proneness to evil, deadness to good, resistance to Your Spirit's motions, may never provoke You to abandon me. May my hard heart awake Your pity, not Your wrath, And if the enemy gets an advantage through my corruption, let it be seen that heaven is mightier than hell, that those for me are greater than those against me. Arise to my help in richness of covenant blessings, keep me feeding in the pastures of Your strengthening Word, searching Scripture to find You there.

If my waywardness is visited with a scourge, enable me to receive correction meekly, to bless the reproving hand, to discern the motive of rebuke, to respond promptly, and do the first work. Let all Your fatherly dealings make me a partaker of Your holiness. Grant that in every fall I may sink lower on my knees, and that when I rise it may be to loftier heights of devotion. May my every cross be sanctified, every loss be gain, every denial a spiritual advantage, every dark day a light of the Holy Spirit, every night of trial a song.⁴⁵

How could what you learned today change how you pray?

Putting Prayer into Practice

Spend a few minutes writing out a prayer based on what you have learned today while keeping Eph 3:14-21 in mind. If you have things in your life you need prayer for think about how you might pray for that in your prayer.

Small Group Prayer

Gather in Small groups and spend the next 10 minutes praying either what you have written or a prayer for the lost and for spiritual needs.

Homework

Seek to spend an extra 15 minutes praying each day. This could be at one time or 5 min three times a day.

Close the class with prayer.

⁴⁵ Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, 133.

Prayer Class Week 7 Hindrances to Prayer

Welcome

Ask if anyone can recall what was discussed in the previous class

Edward Payson wrote, “We may judge of the state of our hearts by the earnestness of our prayers. You cannot make a rich man beg like a poor man; you cannot make a man that is full cry for food like one that is hungry: no more will a man who has a good opinion of himself, cry for mercy like one who feels that he is poor and needy.”⁴⁶

Open in Prayer

Where we Pray and Hindrances to prayer

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (7) “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. (8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Mat 6:5-15).

Where do we Pray

- Pray everywhere

“pray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5:17). Prayer without ceasing is prayer while you are living life. Longer prayers may occur on a car ride, while short ones could be a quick “God, please help me.”

- Alone
 - “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matt 6:6).
 - “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35).
 - “Your room” is a small room or storage area.
 - Alone prayer is a time for just you and God no distractions, unlike the pray everywhere.
 - Do you have a place where you can go to be alone with God?
- With Family
 - With spouse and/or children
- Small Gatherings

⁴⁶ Edward Payson, *Memoir and Select Thoughts of the Late Rev Edward Payson*, ed. Asa Cummings (Philadelphia: J. & J. L. Gihon, 1851), 525.

- Act 12:12 When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.
- In a Worship Service

Hindrances to Prayer

Often when prayers go unanswered, we assume that it must not be God's will, so we stop. However, what if the problem is not with God but with us.

Let us look at six hindrances to prayer.

1. Marital or family discord and strife
 - “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet 3:7).

2. Pride
 - “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luk 18:10-14).
 - Was the Pharisee saying anything wrong?
 - What is the difference?
 - How would that pride appear in your prayers?

3. Sin and Idolatry

J.I. Packer writes, “praying and sinning will never live together in the same heart. Prayer will consume sin, or sin will choke prayer. I cannot forget this. I look at men's lives. I believe few pray.”⁴⁷

- “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened (Ps 66:18).
- “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him” (1 John 3:21-22).
- Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them?” (Ezek 14:1-3).

⁴⁷ Packer and Nystrom, *Praying*, 17.

- “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas 4:3-4).
 - Are they asking?
 - Yes, in fact the verb “carries the idea of pleading, begging, imploring.”⁴⁸
 - Why are they not receiving?
 - Wrong motives or desires
 - “Spend means to completely use up or squander.”⁴⁹
 - “The gift-giving God is here manipulated as a kind of vending machine precisely for purposes of self-gratification.”⁵⁰
 - What are they asking for?

4. Unforgiveness

- “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25).

5. Doubt

- “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (Jas 1:6-7).
 - You must Ask (imperative verb in the Greek)
 - “James is not giving personal advice but a divine command, and therefore our calling on the Lord for wisdom is not an option. It is mandatory.”⁵¹
 - You must ask in Faith
 - “A request of God must be made in faith. This could be understood to mean that it is up to believers to convince themselves that God will give them what they ask for and somehow to expunge all traces of uncertainty from their minds.”⁵²
 - “A continuing confidence in the identity and nature of our God.”⁵³

⁴⁸ John MacArthur, *James, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 190.

⁴⁹ MacArthur, *James*, 190.

⁵⁰ Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 330.

⁵¹ MacArthur, *James*, 36.

⁵² McCartney, *James*, 90.

⁵³ Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary*

- Doubt in prayer reveals unbelief, which is sin.
 - “A request that does not take God at His word, that doubts either His ability or His trustworthiness, is presumptuous and worthless and is an affront.”⁵⁴
 - “The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea”
 - “A wave is passive, susceptible to change and manipulation, because it has no shape of its own. It is always shifting, never solid, never sure where or what it is, without foundation.”⁵⁵
 - They will receive nothing
6. Lack of reconciliation
- “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23-24).
7. Material things
- a. John Calvin writes something similar “It is therefore necessary that we should be subject, from first to last, to the scourges of God, in order that we may from the heart call on him; for our hearts are enfeebled by prosperity, so that we cannot make the effort to pray.”⁵⁶

The Necessity of Right Motives

Manton states, “the evil motives from which some have dared to shape their requests have their source, again, in evil desire, that is, their ‘pleasures’ (v. 1). In such prayers God is regarded as a mere dispensary of instruments of vice.”⁵⁷

Paul wrote, “do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal 6:7-8).

Praying the Psalms

A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand

Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 52.

⁵⁴ MacArthur, *James*, 38.

⁵⁵ McCartney, *James*, 90.

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)*, comm. on Zech 13:9.

⁵⁷ Thomas Manton, *An Exposition of the Epistle of James* (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2006) comm. on Jas 1:5, Accordance Bible Software.

upholds me. But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped (Ps 63:1-11).

Puritan Prayer

Longings After God

MY DEAR LORD,
I can but tell thee that thou knowest
I long for nothing but thyself,
nothing but holiness,
nothing but union with thy will.
Thou hast given me these desires,
and thou alone canst give me the thing desired.
My soul longs for communion with thee,
for mortification of indwelling corruption,
especially spiritual pride.
How precious it is
to have a tender sense and clear apprehension
of the mystery of godliness,
of true holiness!
What a blessedness to be like thee
as much as it is possible for a creature
to be like its Creator!
Lord, give me more of thy likeness;
Enlarge my soul to contain fullness of holiness;
Engage me to live more for thee.
Help me to be less pleased with my spiritual
experiences,
and when I feel at ease after sweet communings,
teach me it is far too little I know and do.
Blessed Lord,
let me climb up near to thee,
and love, and long, and plead, and wrestle
with thee,
and pant for deliverance from the body of sin,
for my heart is wandering and lifeless,
and my soul mourns to think it should ever
lose sight of its Beloved.
Wrap my life in divine love,
and keep me ever desiring thee,
always humble and resigned to thy will,
more fixed on thyself,
that I may be more fitted for doing
and suffering.⁵⁸

How could what you learned today change how you pray?

Putting Prayer into Practice

⁵⁸ Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, 127.

Spend a few minutes writing out a prayer based on what you have learned today while keeping Psalms 63 in mind. If you have things in your life you need prayer for think about how you might pray for that in your prayer.

Small Group Prayer

Gather in Small groups and spend the next 10 minutes praying either what you have written or a prayer a lost individual or for a more of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Homework

Seek to spend an extra 15 minutes praying each day. This could be at one time or 5 min three times a day. Close the class with prayer.

Prayer Class Week 8 Putting Prayer Into Practice

Welcome

Ask if anyone can recall what was discussed in the previous class

Welcome

Open in Prayer

Spend time answering questions written on the 3x5 cards handed out during week 1.

If no questions are asked provide some answers to popular questions

1. Is it ok to read prayers?
2. Can we pray to Jesus or the Holy Spirit?
3. Is corporate prayer important?
4. What is the connection between prayer and fasting?
5. Why do we say Amen at the end of prayer?

The early church was a praying church as we see in Acts.

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

(Acts 1:14)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31)

This week we will be focusing on putting prayer into practice. Taking what we have learned and applying it to our lives.

Spend a few minutes having everyone look through the prayers they had written out each week.

1. Take time to add additions to those prayers or make adjustments.
2. Everyone take a few minutes to pray. They can use their written prayer, pray a new prayer, or pray Scripture.

Group Project

Break everyone into small groups.

1. Spend 15 minutes sharing with each other what has been helpful from this class.
2. Spend 15 minutes as a group praying for the church
3. Spend 15 minutes pray for missionaries
4. Spend time praying for the lost
5. Spend time praying for those who face persecution for the name of Christ

Homework

Seek to spend an extra 15 minutes praying each day. This could be at one time or 5 min three times a day.

Close the class with prayer.

APPENDIX 6
STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN

This appendix contains the Strategic Ministry Plan to increase the practice of prayer individually and corporately. The following proposal for a church prayer meeting was approved by a panel of three pastors and staff at GCV.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ See appendix 7

Grace Church of the Valley Prayer Meeting

Prayer has played a vital role in the church since its founding. Christ's followers after the ascension "with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). When Peter was in prison, "earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church" (Acts 12:5). Paul writes that "you also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many" (2 Cor 1:11). Understanding the importance of prayer by the church for the church, it would be wonderful to have a regular meeting to gather for prayer.

The humble suggestion is to start a monthly or quarterly gathering for prayer. Meeting in this manner seems like the best way to introduce a prayer meeting to the church. It would also allow the church to pray without creating too many additional burdens for staff. Family participation in the event would be encouraged. This would enable children to see the church put prayer into practice.

Location: Generations building

Time: Two options

Sunday night from 6:00-7:00
or noon following church.

Food: Potluck style meal (after talking to several people they felt that food would be a good addition).

The plan for the event would be as follows

1. Eating and fellowship time
2. Welcome and overview of the evening as well as the focus of that night's prayer time.
3. 2-3 worship songs
4. Reading of a Psalm or other passage related to the evening's prayer focus
5. Prayer time, those who feel led can pray in the larger group or in small groups.
 - a. An elder will give the first prayer
 - b. Prayer time will start with prayers of adoration and thanksgiving.
 - c. Prayers of confession for the church and the larger community
 - d. Finally, prayers of supplication and intercession
 - i. Prayers for the lost
 - ii. Missionaries
 - iii. Those in government
 - iv. The church and individuals
6. Closing prayer

Such an event would require the support of all the pastors and elders. Without their support and attendance, the success of this undertaking would be significantly hindered.

"Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear" (Isa 65:24).

APPENDIX 7

STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate the ministry plan to increase the practice of prayer individually and corporately among attendees of GCV. The panel comprised three pastors and staff who utilized the rubric to evaluate the plan's potential and feasibility.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Corporate Prayer Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool					
Lesson to Be Evaluated:					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The plan will positively impact corporate prayer at GCV.					
The plan has biblical justification.					
The plan allows for multiple generations to participate.					
The plan can be coordinated with GCV's various ministries.					
The plan takes into account church limitations (financial, logistical, etc.)					
The plan explains the steps for implementation					
Overall, the plan clearly moves GCV toward a more biblical approach to corporate prayer					

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF PRAYER AT GRACE CHURCH OF THE VALLEY, KINGSBURG, CALIFORNIA

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The purpose of this project is to create a culture of prayer at Grace Church of the Valley, Kingsburg, California, by equipping members to pray consistently and biblically. Chapter 1 presents the ministry context of GCV, along with the goals and rationale for this project. Chapter 2 provides an exegesis of four passages of Scripture (Rom 12:12; 1 Tim 2:1-2; Col 4:2; Eph 6:18) to show that devotion to prayer individually and corporately is the means by which Christians receive what is needed both physically and spiritually. Chapter 3 gives practical and historical evidence that supports the purpose of this project by demonstrating a call to prayer in the examples and teaching of Jesus and Paul. Chapter 4 provides details of the project, its creation, course curriculum, and implementation at GCV. Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the project to determine whether the course curriculum effectively equipped participants to pray consistently and biblically.

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