

Studies on Prayer

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Introduction: The Early Conversations in the Church

Genesis 2 and 3

Billy Graham said, “Prayer is simply a two-way conversation between you and God.” From the beginning, we were created to be in a relationship with God. Conversation was a crucial part of that relationship. The early conversations with God are a good place to begin a study on prayer.

1. Read Genesis 2:15–22. What does God say to Adam in his early conversations with him? Why does God speak?

2. Describe Adam’s response to God. In a perfect relationship, how does a person respond to God’s word? (2:23–25)

3. Genesis 3:1–6 describes Adam and Eve conversing with the serpent. How is that conversation different from the conversation with God?

4. Remember that God is omniscient, all-knowing. How does God respond to Adam and Eve’s sin? (3:7–11) Why would God have asked those questions and how does that apply to our own prayer lives?

5. How do Adam and Eve respond to God? (3:12-13)

6. Verses 14-24 describe the judgment that fell upon Adam and Eve. Who is God speaking to in verse 22?

7. How is conversation with God impacted by sin? What is a perfect conversation with God?

*I suspect that if we saw the difference even the tiniest of our prayers make,
and all the people those little prayers were destined to affect,
and all the consequences of those prayers down through the centuries,
we would be so paralyzed with awe at the power of prayer that we would be unable
to get off our knees for the rest of our lives.*

-Peter Kreeft

Praying like Jesus

John 17

John Chapter 17 is the prayer Jesus offered, knowing he would be arrested that evening and crucified the next day. The setting of the prayer is often given more attention than the content. The prayer describes, in Jesus' own words, his relationship with his Father and the future relationship he wants for his disciples to have with God and with him. Theologian C. H. Spurgeon said, "If you want that splendid power in prayer, you must remain in loving, living, lasting, conscious, practical, abiding union with the Lord Jesus Christ." Our relationship to Jesus should be like the relationship he had with God. That personal relationship is revealed in his prayer.

Jesus had been speaking with his disciples in the Upper Room, preparing them for his death and resurrection (John 13--16). Then he prayed. What did Jesus ask of God? (17:1) When would that be an appropriate prayer request for your life?

1. How did Jesus glorify God? (17:2-5) What should we pray for, if we want to glorify God?

2. Whom does Jesus pray for next? (17:6-9) How does Jesus describe them to God?

3. What does Jesus ask his Father to do for his disciples? (17:10-12) How will his prayer be answered?

4. Look again at verse 12. Whom does Jesus “not” pray for and why? How does this knowledge guide your prayers?

5. Read 17:13–16. Why do the disciples need God’s protection?

6. How is a person sanctified? (17:17–19) How do we pray for sanctification?

7. How did Jesus pray for believers today? (17:20–21) What does his request mean to our own prayer lives and to our public witness?

8. Look carefully at 17:22–23. How was Jesus’ prayer answered, or how is it being answered in your life?

9. What does Jesus ask God for, on our behalf? (17:24) How can we follow his example?

10. Jesus closes his prayer with a commitment to God. Describe that commitment and the priorities of Jesus’ final hours on earth.

11. How does the prayer of Jesus shape or redefine your ideas about prayer? In what ways will you try to pray more like Jesus?

“Go where your best prayers take you.”

-Frederick Buechner

Effective, Powerful Prayer

James 5

Norman Vincent Peale wrote, “Prayer is the greatest technique God ever gave us. If you will pray and keep on praying and pray some more, there isn’t any difficulty that need dishearten you. You will get your heart back by prayer.” A recent survey asked people what they pray about and 74% of them responded “my own problems and difficulties.” Even people of little or no faith often pray when things are tough. We serve a big God who hears every prayer. James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote to encourage and teach Jewish Christians, perhaps those that had been scattered after the stoning of Stephen. James concluded his practical book by talking about the importance of prayer. He, like Norman Vincent Peale, would say that prayer is the greatest technique God ever gave us.

Glance over, or read, the book of James, and take note of the various topics addressed.

1. Chapter 5 begins with the words, “Now listen, you rich people.” Theologians do not believe he is addressing Christians with that statement, but rather the wealthy Jews and Romans. What prophetic word does James want the early Christians to understand about their current situation? (James 5:1–6)

2. Look again and verse 4. The name used for God is first found in 1 Samuel 1:3. That name carries the same meaning as “Lord of hosts” or commander of armies. What does James want the reader to understand about God in verse 4?

3. What is James’s admonition to the early Jewish Christians, and to Christians today when we find ourselves in times of trial or suffering? (5:7–9)

4. Who are we to remember when we consider “perseverance?” Why is this comforting? Troublesome? (5:10–11)

5. Verse 12 refers to the casual use of the name of God. What does James say about irreverent use of God’s name?

6. What should a Christian do in times of trouble? (5:13)

7. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9–10. Why should a Christian praise God in times of trouble?

8. James 5:14–15 is a much-debated passage. What does James recommend be done for a sick person?

9. The “oil” can be either medicinal or spiritual in value. Theologians cannot agree whether James meant physical or spiritual healing. Regardless, who was to administer the oil, and why is that significant to healing?

10. “Therefore,” why should a Christian pray during times of trouble/ illness? (5:16)

11. Look again at verse 16. Who should you ask to pray for you, or counsel you, during difficult times? What is the example James uses for a “righteous man?” (5:17–18)

12. What commitment is God calling you to consider for your own prayer life, from this passage in James?

“Each time, before you intercede, be quiet first, and worship God in His glory. Think of what He can do, and how He delights to hear the prayers of His redeemed people. Think of your place and privilege in Christ, and expect great things!”

-Andrew Murray

Praying for Prosperity

Chronicles 4:9–10

The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life was published in the year 2000. The book is both popular and controversial. Many have said that it promotes a “prosperity gospel” while others say it promotes the power of prayer. Based on a short passage from the book of 1 Chronicles, the book is literally the prayer of a man named Jabez. Dr. Bruce Wilkinson, the author, wrote, “This petition has radically changed what I expect from God and what I experience every day by his power” (pg.7). The Prayer of Jabez was on the New York Times bestseller list, selling more than 9 million copies. This book does discuss what it means to be a prosperous, powerful Christian, but a student of the Bible must always view any book as separate from Scripture. Dr. Wilkinson’s book is good to consider, but it is still just a book. A Christian should pray for prosperity and power but must understand those concepts as God reveals them in the Bible.

1. Read 1 Chronicles 4:9. What does Scripture tell us about the man, Jabez?
2. What might be the redemptive purpose in the author noting the circumstances that surround his birth?
3. The verses about Jabez are listed among the extensive genealogical records found in the beginning of 1 Chronicles. Jabez, however, is given an atypical mention. His character is highlighted. The connection between his character, and his prayer seems to be the point. What three things does Jabez pray for? (4:10)
4. How does God respond to the prayer of Jabez?

5. Jabez prays for the blessing of an “enlarged territory.” What would that have meant to an Israelite in exile? How would Christians define that word today?

6. Psalm 67 contains only a few verses, but it reveals King David’s request for blessings. What blessings does David ask from God?

7. Jabez asked that God keep him free from harm and pain, and verse 10 reveals that God granted his request. The struggle with this verse is obvious. From the following verses, why is this prayer of Jabez not to be viewed as a “formula” for success or prosperity:

Genesis 39:23

Joshua 1:7

2 Chronicles 20:20

James 4:13–17

1 Samuel 18:14

Deuteronomy 2:7

8. In what ways do you want God to prosper you today and give you success? List those blessings that you would like to pray for. Then take time to pray for them.

“Whatsoever leads you to God is a true blessing. Riches may not do it. There may be a golden wall between you and God. Health will not do it: even the strength and marrow of your bones may keep you at a distance from your God. But anything that draws you nearer to him is a true blessing.”

-C. H. Spurgeon

Praying with Purpose

Nehemiah 1:1–2:10

The Babylonians swept through Judah, taking captive the Jewish nation. All that the Jewish prophets had warned about had come to pass. Around two or three million Jews were deported from the Promised Land and spent seventy years separated from the temple and the life God had planned for them. The first Jews to return only numbered about 50,000. The vast majority, about ninety-eight percent of the Jewish nation, chose to stay where they were. They considered the Promised Land their past history, rather than their future. When the early refugees returned, they planned to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and the temple, but the current residents of the area were threatened and resisted the efforts of the Jews. The wall and the temple continued to lie in rubble. Nehemiah was a Jew who had risen to an influential position under Persian rule but heard of the struggles of his fellow Jews in Jerusalem and wanted to help. The story of Nehemiah is one of the best examples in Scripture of answered prayer, as God and man work together.

Read Nehemiah 1–2:10.

1. Describe Nehemiah's reaction to the news he received from Jerusalem. What words do you think would describe Nehemiah's relationship to God? (1:1–4)

2. When, if ever, have you felt called to a time of fasting and prayer similar to Nehemiah's? Do you think of fasting in order to pray as an important spiritual discipline? Why or why not?

3. When Nehemiah prayed, how did he address God? (1:5) When you bow your head, how do you view the One you are praying to?

4. From verse 6, how does Nehemiah view himself? How does that explain his requests in the remainder of verse 6 and verse 7?

5. What does Nehemiah mean by “remember?” What important lesson about prayer is taught in verses 8–9? In John 14:26, what should we “remember” to do in our prayer lives?

6. Whom are the people Nehemiah is praying for? (1:10–11) From verse 11, why does Nehemiah need to request God’s favor? When do you seek to find favor with God and others, and for what purpose?

7. A cupbearer to the king was a highly paid position of honor. Poison was a weapon used to bring down a king. The cupbearer’s job was to protect any liquid that the king consumed, often testing it before the king drank. The cupbearer was paid highly so that he could not be bribed. Describe King Artaxerxes’ reaction when he saw Nehemiah. What does that say about the character of Nehemiah and the past favor he had found with the king? (2:1–2a)

8. Verses 2b–3 teach an important lesson about prayer. Think about Nehemiah’s feelings and his actions. What does this passage teach about the “power” of prayer?

9. When the king asks Nehemiah to make his request, what does Nehemiah do before speaking? (2:4) Read Jeremiah 33:3. Why is this a valuable lesson for our own lives?

10. On what does Nehemiah base his request? (2:5a) The Israelites had been held as captives, brought to the land against their will. Nehemiah was a direct descendant of those people. What is the value of finding favor with others, even those who do not share our faith?

11. Nehemiah is with the king and the queen. What is his request and how did the king feel about it? (2:5b-6)

12. Read 2:7-10. How does this passage teach the mutual relationship between God and man? From verse 10, what can we expect as we seek to find favor with both God and man?

“I have seen many men work without praying, though I have never seen any good come out of it; but I have never seen a man pray without working.”
-James Hudson Taylor

Genuine Prayer

Luke 18:9–14

Public prayers are sometimes the most dangerous words to speak. The current trend is to open a public meeting in prayer, but not to be specific to a certain God or religion. According to Jesus, that would not be a prayer God would honor. Prayer has often been used in public places, even churches, to promote personal agendas. How sad to bow our heads before the Father and never utter a word that He could acknowledge. Jesus angered people by teaching a parable about prayer, because they knew it was directed at them. The principles taught in his parable are timeless because the sins Jesus addressed are repeated in every generation.

Read Luke 18:9–14.

1. How does Luke describe the people to whom Jesus addressed his parable? (18:9) What are the cautions to our own prayer lives?

2. Who are the two people, and where are they praying? Why is this significant? (18:10)

3. Describe the Pharisee's prayer. (18:11–12)

4. Describe the prayer of the tax collector. (18:13)

5. At first glance, it appears that both men pray about their own selves. What do you think Jesus meant by “prayed about himself?”

6. Compare and contrast the view of God that each man held. Read Hebrews 4:14–16. How can we approach God with confidence, but not arrogance?

7. From verse 14, the tax collector returned home “justified.” Use a Bible dictionary or Study Bible note. What does it mean to be “justified?”

8. Read Proverbs 3:32–35. Why is it so important to pray from a genuine relationship with God?

9. Read the passages below. How can a person “humble himself?”

Isaiah 66:1–2

Philippians 2:3–11

10. From the passages below, what does it mean to be exalted?

2 Corinthians 5:21

1 John 3:2

11. What cautions and/or encouragements do you want to apply to your own prayer life from Jesus' parable?

"In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart."

-John Bunyan

Praying for Victory

2 Chronicles 14

Asa was the great-grandson of King Solomon. Israel divided into two kingdoms after the death of Solomon, becoming the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. For forty-one years King Asa ruled over Judah. In his early years, he destroyed the altars of the pagan gods and commanded the people to return to the biblical worship of God their forefathers had established. God blessed Asa with peace for the first ten years, and he amassed an army of 580,000 men. Then Asa received word the Ethiopian king was planning to wage war on Judah.

1. What did King Asa do that helped to restore the relationship between the Kingdom of Judah and God? (14:1–6)
2. What was Asa able to accomplish because his country was at peace? (14:7–8)
3. Read 2 Chronicles 7:1–18. What had the Lord promised Asa's great grandfather, King Solomon?
4. When we pray for our nation, what should we expect from God? From one another?

5. Describe the threat to Judah ten years after Asa had become king (14:9–10).

6. Found in verse 11, Asa's prayer is one of the most profound prayers in Scripture. What does King Asa understand about the threat to Judah?

7. Think again about the promise from 2 Chronicles 7:14. Then read Psalm 20, a psalm of King David. What hinders us from placing complete trust in God?

8. Read 2 Chronicles 14:12–15. What was the result of Asa's prayer and his complete trust in God?

9. What "victory" have you been praying for? Is your prayer something God is able to honor?

10. List again, the three things that enabled God to honor Asa's prayer. (14:11)

11. When you are praying for God's help and blessing, what is the hope offered in Asa's prayer?

12. What do you most want to remember from Asa's prayer that will enhance your own prayer life?

*"God will not go forth with that man who marches in his own strength."
-Charles Spurgeon*

Praying for Restoration

Daniel 9

Daniel, chapter nine, is both historical and apocalyptic. Learned theologians have debated the numerology, the setting, and the purpose of Daniel's words. Some have even questioned the authorship as belonging to the prophet Daniel, the one who stood in the den of lions. This study will not seek to prove one interpretation over another. The purpose instead, is to look at the power of prayer to restore a nation to God.

Read Daniel 9. (And don't worry about the parts you can't understand. Focus instead, on what is made clear.)

1. The Babylonian empire was conquered by the Medes, Persians and other allies in 539 BC. Daniel, who had been taken captive by the Babylonians, was a student of the Scriptures and knowledgeable about the teaching of the prophets. Read Jeremiah 25:11-12. Why is Daniel compelled to pray? (9:1-2)

2. How does verse 3 describe Daniel's time of prayer?

3. What is Daniel's confession to God? (9:4-6)

4. What does Daniel say is the reason for their exile? (9:7-10)

5. Read Deuteronomy 28:62–64. What does Daniel understand about his exile? (9:11–14)

6. Daniel is always mentioned as being a man of God. The prophets had done their best to warn the Jewish nation that God's judgment was coming. We know, however, that all people sin (Romans 3:23). Daniel is describing the covenant that God made with the nation Israel. He is speaking about the sins of the nation more than personal confession. What does Daniel's prayer reveal about the consequences of sin to the lives of those around us? What do verses 9:11–14 teach for our own prayer times?

7. How does Daniel describe God? Remembering that Daniel is still living under the Old Testament covenant, why do you think Daniel would ask God to consider the current state of Jerusalem, his holy hill? (9:15–16)

8. Daniel cries out to God in verses 9:17–19. On what basis does Daniel appeal to God? What is his overwhelming desire and motivation to pray, from verse 19?

9. How should we be praying for the witness of the Church today?

10. When and how did God answer Daniel's prayer? (9:20–23) Why do you think Daniel's prayer was answered so quickly?

11. The remainder of chapter 9 is Gabriel's revelation to Daniel. Verse 25 speaks of the "Anointed One," the Messiah. What will take place before his coming? (9:24-25)

12. The "Anointed One" is cut off in verse 26. Many theologians think of this as the crucifixion of Christ. Who then is "the ruler" that follows and when will his rule end? (9:26-27)

13. How should Christians today be praying for restoration? How will you include a prayer like Daniel's in your own times of prayer?

"We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!"

-Abraham Lincoln

Prayer that Benefits Others

John 11:38–44

In his famous devotional, *My Utmost For his Highest*, Oswald Chambers wrote, “Prayer is the way that the life of God in us is nourished. Our common ideas regarding prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer simply as a means of getting things for ourselves, but the biblical purpose of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself.” Often when we bow our heads to pray for others, we believe we are praying solely for the sake of another. Our prayers for others are often a means of changing ourselves, or our plans, so that we will rightly minister to others. Jesus set that example just before he entered Jerusalem for the final week of his earthly ministry. The events in John 11 were a “final straw” of sorts with the Jewish leaders. When Jesus prayed, he set the timing of his own death. The words of his prayer would be spoken to benefit others.

Read all of John 11.

1. What is the setting and circumstances surrounding Jesus’ prayer? (John 11:1–37)
2. Look again at verse 33 then verse 38. Why do you think Jesus wept (v. 35)?
3. Why did Martha hesitate at the thought of removing the stone? (11:39)
4. Why is Jesus going to raise Lazarus from the dead? (11:40)

5. Jesus looked up and prayed. Why do you believe he took this posture of prayer?
(v. 41)

6. Jesus addresses God as “Father” using the Greek word pater. That Greek word was a respectful way for a son to address his father. The fact that Jesus used that word to pray, was one of the reasons the Pharisees were angry with him and thought he blasphemed. Jesus explains why he began his prayer as he did. Glance at verses 45 and 46. Why did Jesus pray as he did in verses 41 and 42?

7. How does Jesus pray “for” Lazarus and for the benefit of the crowd? (11:43–44)

8. Look carefully at verse 48. Why were the Jewish leaders concerned about Jesus?

9. The question is often asked, “Why doesn’t God do more miracles?” How is this passage an answer to that question?

10. What does this passage teach about praying for miracles?

11. What happened as a result of Jesus’ prayer and Lazarus’s raising from the dead?
(11:54)

12. Read Ephesians 6:18–20. What does this passage teach about prayer that benefits others?

“Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers.”

-J. Sidlow Baxter

Prayer That Exalts God

1 Samuel 1:1–11; Luke 1:46–56

The word exalt is a verb meaning, “to hold (someone or something) in very high regard; think or speak very highly of; raise to a higher rank or a position of greater power; make noble in character; dignify.” Psalm 99:9 says, “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His holy hill, for holy is the LORD our God.” We are not told to exalt God because that places him in a higher position, we are told to exalt God so that we recognize and honor the position He owns, always—in our lives, in our circumstances, and in the world. Both Hannah and Mary understood that God had blessed her life and created her child for his greater purpose. Both women “exalted” God in prayer.

Read 1 Samuel 1:1–11.

1. 1 Samuel 1 tells the story of Hannah and her struggle to have a baby. Read her powerful prayer in 1 Samuel 1:9–18. Hannah will give birth to a son and call him Samuel. Every Christian will pray with a broken heart at some point in his or her journey. How might the timing described in verse 1 Samuel 1:11 indicate God’s answer to Hannah’s prayer?

2. Not everyone receives a “yes” in prayer. Read 2 Corinthians 12:8–10. How did Paul exalt God even though his prayers did not change his circumstances?

3. Read 1 Samuel 1:21–28. What does Hannah do with her “answered prayer?” Do you think her actions are related to God’s answer?

4. The word “horn” is a word for strength. For what does Hannah praise God? (2:1)

5. From verse 2, what does Hannah understand about God? Why is that understanding crucial to our prayer lives?

6. What admonition does Hannah offer in her prayer? (2:3) Why is this a vital warning if we wish to exalt God in our prayers?

7. Verses 4–10 teach a powerful lesson about praying for God’s blessings. Read the verses carefully. What is the truth Hannah understands about God’s blessings upon our earthly lives? How does a person “prevail” in his or her life on earth?

The angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to God’s son, the Messiah. Mary did not understand how it could be possible, but in faith she believed the words of the angel would come to pass. Mary went to see her cousin, Elizabeth, who strengthened and encouraged her faith in all that the angel had said. Luke is the only one who records Mary’s song, the Magnificat, because he is probably the only one Mary told. The word Magnificat means “glories.” Mary exalts the Lord for the favor he has shown her. Read her Magnificat in Luke 1:46–55.

8. Think about Mary’s and Hannah’s Kingdom priorities. How would your prayers change, if adjusted to honor and include those same priorities?

9. Why is Mary in awe of God? (Luke 1:46–49) Think about the “great things” God has done in your life. How have you praised him?

10. What does Mary understand about God's ability to bless? (1:50-55)

11. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-9. Describe the life that God is able to bless.

12. Take time to "count your blessings." Name them "one by one." Exalt God for who He is and all that He has done in your life. Psalm 29 is David's song of praise. Take time to read and meditate on his words of exaltation. Then make your list, and check it twice. Exalt God for all he has done in your life and offer prayers of praise.

"I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder."

-G. K. Chesterton

Wrestling with God

Genesis 32

Jacob had struggled his entire life to earn blessings. He was born holding the heel of his twin brother, Esau. Jacob's mother encouraged him to fight for his father's blessing, even if it meant he would have to use deception to get it. Then Jacob was forced to leave home in order to keep what was never rightfully his in the first place. Jacob worked for his uncle Laban for seven years so that he could marry his daughter, Rachel. The morning after the wedding, Jacob woke up with Leah, Rachel's sister, and learned he would need to work another seven years. Jacob was on his way home to Canaan, his inheritance but not his birthright, when, as he neared the land, he learned Esau was coming to meet him. Jacob had prayed for a blessed life, but he would learn that God's blessings were not paychecks to be earned; instead, they were gifts to be received.

Read Genesis 32.

1. When Jacob reached the border of Canaan, what did he see? Read Genesis 15:18. Why would Jacob have been reminded that he was approaching "the camp of God?"

2. How does Jacob choose to seek favor with Esau? (32:3-5)

3. How should a person "find favor" with God and man? (Proverbs 3:1-6)

4. How does Jacob handle the news when his messengers return? (32:6-8)

5. After Jacob makes his earlier preparations, he prays. Study Jacob's prayer. What do you think his prayer indicates about his knowledge of God and his trust in Him?

6. Do you think Jacob's prayer is a good model for a person in crisis? Why or why not?

7. After Jacob prayed, what did he do? (32:13-22) Do you think this was action prompted by his prayer?

8. Look carefully at 32:23-26. Describe Jacob's situation in these verses.

9. Now read Hosea 12:2-4. How does Hosea describe this moment in biblical history?

10. The name Jacob means holder of the heel or supplanter. The name Israel means: May God prevail. He struggles with God. God perseveres; contends. How does God answer Jacob's prayer for blessing? (32:27-28)

11. Read 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. From these verses and from Jacob’s story, what is the most important blessing we should seek? (32:29–30)

12. What lasting reminder did Jacob have of his time with God? (32:31–32)

And 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.

-Hebrews 11:6

Praying for Wisdom

1 Kings 3:1–15

King Solomon was the second son of King David and Bathsheba. He found favor with his father and with God. Under Solomon's leadership, Israel reached the highest point in its history. It took Solomon seven years to build the temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem; it became one of the wonders of the ancient world. He also built an impressive palace, gardens, roads and other important cultural institutions. He amassed a large army and increased trade with other nations. King Solomon became the wealthiest king in the world, but he achieved his position at the expense of his fellow Jews and by compromising godly principles. It is sobering to consider how the history of Israel would have been altered if Solomon had remained faithful to his early relationship with God.

Read 1 Kings 3:1–15.

1. Why did Solomon find favor with God? What behaviors would God oppose? (3:1–3)
2. Gibeon was an area rich in biblical history. Glance over Joshua 9–10:15 and describe the two major events that occurred in Gibeon.
3. “Gibeon” means “hill city,” and the Israelites established a tabernacle there after the land was conquered. It remained a “most important high place” until Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem. Why did Solomon go to Gibeon and how might that explain the dream he has while there? (3:4–5)

4. When, where, and why do you seek God's presence and "expect" him to speak to you?

5. Read 1 Chronicles 22. Why would the experience between King Solomon and God be a natural expectation for this time at Gibeon?

6. Why does Solomon believe he has found favor with God? (3:4-6)

7. Read Hebrews 4:15-16. When you pray, why do you have favor with God?

8. Why does Solomon feel "unqualified" for the task in front of him? What does he understand about his need for God? (3:7-9)

9. Why was the Lord "pleased" with King Solomon's request? (3:10-12)

10. How is this a lesson to each of us, in regard to our own prayer requests?

11. What did the Lord plan to do in Solomon's life? (3:13-15)

12. Read Ephesians 3:20-21. How does this lesson from King Solomon's life teach us to pray with expectations?

13. King Solomon died a wealthy, successful king but came to understand, in his later years, that he had misused his blessings. Read Ecclesiastes 12:11-14. What would King Solomon teach us today about how to pray and how to be faithful stewards of our answered prayers?

“The Divine wisdom has given us prayer, not as a means whereby to obtain the good things of earth, but as a means whereby we learn to do without them; not as a means whereby we escape evil, but as a means whereby we become strong to meet it.”

-Frederick William Robertson

Praying against evil

Psalm 140

David was supposed to be the king but, instead, was hunted like an animal by King Saul and others. He spent about twenty-five years running, fighting and trying to survive. David would have grown weary and desperate at times. It was probably during that difficult period of his life that he wrote Psalm 140. The psalm is David's prayer to God for protection against the evils around him. The psalm is not directed at any one evil, but rather all evil, much like Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the model prayer. Evil is a very real part of life for every generation. Psalm 140 teaches the way to pray for God to "deliver us."

Read Psalm 140.

1. What does David understand about praying for protection from evil? (v. 1) Why is this essential knowledge for our own prayer lives?

2. Who is an "evildoer?" (vv. 1-3) Why is this a psalm for the ages?

3. What actions does David pray against? (vv. 4--5)

4. We are often taught to pray specifically, but David does not list names in his prayer. Why is that an appropriate lesson for us today?

5. When praying against evil, what must we remember, and why? (v. 6)

6. Why can God be trusted for our protection? (v. 7) What causes us to hesitate?

7. How does David pray “specifically” for God’s protection? (v. 8) Look again at your answer to question four. How do we pray specifically for protection?

8. What did David “pray for his enemies?” (vv. 9 -11)

9. What was David’s comfort, even when he was forced to live with constant danger and evil? (vv. 12--13)

10. Peter used a quote from Psalm 34, another of David’s psalms, when he advised the early Christian church how to handle persecution. Read 1 Peter 3:8-17. How would Peter advise us to pray against evil?

11. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1–3. This is a good verse to think about when praying for God to protect someone. What did Paul encourage the early believers to think about when they needed protection?

12. Think about the people or places that need God’s protection right now. How has King David taught you to pray for them? Take a moment to use what you have learned, and say a prayer for whatever or whoever the Lord has placed on your heart.

*“A God wise enough to create me and the world is wise enough
to watch out for me.”*

-Philip Yancey

The Prayer of Surrender

Job 42

“The patience of Job” is a common phrase to extol a person who bears up under difficult circumstances. We have all known people who have seemed to suffer more than their share of troubles. The book of Job is a wealth of Scripture on the very real presence of trials and trouble in our earthly lives. Scripture encourages us to seek God in prayer during tough times and ask for God’s mercies. Job offers a perspective on our prayers that is rarely taught, but profoundly important. We often think of Job as an innocent victim, unfairly blamed by family and friends for his misfortune. Job endures his trials, but at times, he endures imperfectly. The great truth of Job is that no one is perfect, and our answers are found in recognizing and surrendering our lives to God’s perfection.

1. Read Job 1:6–12. What is Satan’s accusation against Job? What is Satan unable to do?

2. Read Job 1:13–22. Why is Job considered a man of integrity?

3. Why can suffering and trials cause us to doubt the existence or goodness of God?

Theodicy is the theological study of the relationship between human suffering and God’s divine justice. Human suffering is often the basis of a person’s struggle to maintain or place faith in God. Job loses his family, his possessions, his friends and reaches the point of losing his faith in God’s love. His struggles with others and with God are common to all people.

4. God speaks to Job, after everyone else has offered an opinion, about the cause of Job's trials. From Job 40:6–9, what does God want Job to understand about his divine character?

5. Why is knowledge of God's character crucial to our prayer lives?

6. Job 42 is the final chapter and contains eternal truth about God's character and the necessary position of our hearts in times of prayer and petition. Read the entire chapter. What has Job come to fully recognize about the character of God? (42:1–3)

7. What did Job learn through experiencing his trials? (42:4–6)

8. Read James 1:2–4 and James 1:12. Why does God allow trials, even to those who love him?

9. Look again at Job 42:6 then read James 4:10. Why does God want us to “despise” or “humble” ourselves?

10. How are Job's friends provided the chance to humble themselves? (Job 42:7–9)

11. Why does God want us to pray with humility? (See also: James 5:16)

12. From today's lesson, what does it mean to surrender ourselves to God?

13. Job's surrender to God's perfect will is honored. When and how are Job's prayers for restoration answered? (Job 42:10-17)

“Let God have your life; he can do more with it than you can.”
-Dwight L. Moody

The Prayer of Deliverance

Jonah 2:1–9

The simple outline for the book of Jonah is as follows: Chapter 1 is running from God. Chapter 2 is running to God. Chapter 3 is running with God, and Chapter 4 is running ahead of God. Interestingly, all of us can chart our own spiritual journeys, past, present and future, in each of those four chapters as well.

Every Christian, at some point in his or her life, will pray for deliverance from a set of circumstances. Sometimes our circumstances are a result of our choices; other times we are impacted by the choices of others. Additionally, God can allow or even cause circumstances in our lives in order to guide or teach us. All of us will pray for deliverance, but our approach to God and the purpose for our prayers can be shaped by our circumstances.

Read the book of Jonah if you have the time. This lesson will focus on 2:1–9.

1. What was Jonah's calling from God? (1:1–3)

2. Why should we pray about God's calling or purpose for our lives? What hinders those prayers?

3. Jonah did not want to obey God's calling, so he ran from it. When the storm arose, Jonah knew that God was responding to his disobedience. What should we expect God to do, when we disobey?

4. Read Jonah 1:9–16. Describe Jonah's character with the other people on the boat. From verse 16, what is one way that God redeemed Jonah's choice to run? How did Jonah's character impact his circumstances?

5. Read 1 John 3:21-24. Why does God require and discipline our obedience?

6. What circumstances caused Jonah to cry out to God for deliverance? (2:4-5)

7. Where did Jonah's prayer "go?" (2:6-7) Why is this important to remember when we cry out to God in prayer?

8. What hinders people from receiving God's mercies? (2:8) Why is this essential knowledge for our own prayer lives?

9. How do these verses illustrate Jonah's confidence in God's deliverance? (2:9-10)

10. List at least two lessons to be learned from Jonah's experience about praying for deliverance.

11. Consider your own circumstances. Pray and ask God to apply this lesson to your own spiritual journey. Which chapter of Jonah would you place yourself in today? How does that impact/direct your prayers?

12. Look again at Jonah 2:9. Will you pray and work until you are able to make that same promise to God?

“He can only keep those who have handed themselves over to him.”

-Watchman Nee

Praying for Help

Psalm 31

David was ten to fifteen years old when Samuel anointed him to be the king of Israel. It would take another fifteen years before David would actually assume his position of power. During those fifteen years David was hunted, taunted, and harassed by King Saul, who refused to relinquish his position as the king. David ruled for more than forty years, dying at the age of seventy. His reign as king of Israel was marked with both success and failure. In addition, he spent much of his reign in conflict with surrounding nations who wanted to gain control of the Promised Land and its riches. Psalm 31 is difficult to date, but David wrote the psalm during a tense time of attack. The attacks were personal as well as physical, and David prayed to God for the help he needed.

Read Psalm 31.

1. King David was known as a man after God's own heart. How does David describe his Lord? (vv. 1-2)

2. From verse 3, what is David's motivation to pray for help? How is this an important lesson for our own prayer lives?

3. Jesus quotes Psalm 31:5 from the cross. Why does David need God's help, and how does he pray for that help? (vv. 4-5)

4. From verses 6–8, what should we hate and where should we find our joy?

5. Why is that perspective essential when we pray for help?

6. What is David's prayer request in verses 9–10? How does this teach us to pray for ourselves?

7. What were David's other afflictions? (vv. 11–13) Read James 4:11. From these two passages, what should we do and not do when we are suffering at the hands of others?

8. What is our comfort and peace when we experience troubled times? (vv. 14–16)

9. How does King David pray for his enemies and why? (vv. 17–18)

10. In Matthew 5:43–48, Jesus taught his disciples to love and pray for their enemies. How do you reconcile the words of Christ with David's prayer?

11. Why should we, like David, pray for, and trust God's help? (Psalm 31:19–22)

12. Who or what are our enemies in today's culture? What should be our concerns and our confidence, even when we are praying for help? (vv. 23–24)

“The right way to pray is to stretch out our hands and ask of One who we know has the heart of a father.”

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Prayer of Faith

Matthew 8:1–13

Can our prayers change God's mind? The woman who asked that question was a young, middle-aged woman who had suffered a stroke. The doctors had not given the family much to hope for. But her family and friends prayed, worshipped and believed. The doctors called the woman's recovery "miraculous." Do our prayers, offered in faith, make a difference? The answer is always "yes." Can our prayers change God's mind? Yes, but our prayers do not obligate God to change his mind. He will always do the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons. God's holiness means he is incapable of doing wrong. That is why his children can pray with faith.

Read Matthew 8:1–13.

1. Jesus had just finished preaching his Sermon on the Mount. When he "came down from the mountainside large crowds followed him." Read Leviticus 13:1–3. Why would the man have knelt down before Jesus? (Matthew. 8:1–2)

2. What is the man's statement of faith in verse 2?

3. How does Jesus respond physically and spiritually to the leper? Why are both significant to praying in faith? (v. 3)

4. How is the leper healed physically? Spiritually? (v. 3)

5. Why should we be careful to define “healing” as it is illustrated in this passage?

6. Most theologians believe that Jesus sent the man to the priests, and told him to offer sacrifices so that he could be restored to his community. But Jesus also asked the man not to tell anyone about the miracle. Quite possibly, the greater purpose of Jesus’ ministry would have been obscured by people who only wanted physical healing. Do you think the caution applies to God’s people today? Why or why not?

7. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:9–10. How could faith in Jesus’ ability to heal physically be a distraction from spiritual healing? What cautions or encouragement should that knowledge give to our prayer lives?

8. Capernaum was a city that provided a military outpost for Rome. As a result, many centurions, assigned to the Palestinian region, chose to live there with their families. A centurion was in charge of a hundred soldiers. His commands to those soldiers were respected and followed because he spoke with Roman authority. For whom is the centurion requesting help? (v. 6) How is this a lesson for our own prayer lives?

9. Once again, Jesus agrees to heal. Matthew is careful to point out that the request does not obligate Jesus to heal. Why is that an important truth for ourselves and for others?

10. Jesus offers “to go” to the home of the centurion, a Gentile. What does the Gentile say to Jesus’ offer? (vv 8–9)

11. The centurion speaks about his own ability to issue a command, then he applies that same authority to Jesus' ability to heal. Why is this an illustration of the centurion's great understanding and faith?

12. What did the centurion understand that "all of Israel" did not? (v. 10)

13. Jesus then alluded to the fact that the banquet table in the Kingdom of Heaven would be surrounded by the faithful, rather than those who simply expected their Jewish nationality to save them. Why is it important to seek God's healing rather than expect it?

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness."

-Martin Luther

Praying Through Doubt

Judges 6

The book of Judges covers a time in the life of Israel between the death of Joshua and the appointment of the first king, Saul. When Joshua died, the people struggled because they lacked strong leadership. Neighboring countries took advantage of that time and attempted to invade and control the Promised Land. Infighting began between some of the tribes of Israel, causing even greater turmoil. The people began to intermingle and compromise with other nations, and foreign customs of worship were allowed to weaken Israel. The Judges were people who were divinely raised up to protect or guide the nation of Israel through this time. Gideon was a young man when God called him to be a judge. The Midianites' attacks on Israel had devastated the land to the point that Gideon doubted survival was possible.

Read Judges 6.

1. Describe the conditions the Israelites were enduring. (6:1-6)
2. Read Joshua 24:11-22. Why were the Israelites suffering?
3. Read Judges 6:7-10. How might these verses from Joshua explain Gideon's doubts?
4. Describe the message from the angel of the Lord. Why does Gideon doubt God's presence? (6:11-13).

5. Look carefully at the way “the angel” is described. Who is with Gideon and why should he have been confident? (6:14)

6. Apply the truth of these verses to your personal prayer life. What can cause us to doubt our prayers will be answered? Read 1 John 5:14. What is our confidence?

7. Why does Gideon still doubt his calling? Why should he have been confident? (6:15–16)

8. From 6:17–24. What are possible motivations for Gideon’s actions? Why would the Lord act as He did?

9. Why is our human nature inclined toward “earning” God’s blessing? Why is that flawed theology? Read Matthew 6:30–33. What should we “do” instead?

10. What does the Lord request of Gideon next? (Judges 6:25–27) Gideon is obedient, but how do these verses reveal his doubts?

11. Why was Gideon right to be afraid? Why do you think he was obedient, even in his fear? (6:28–32)

12. What do the Lord's instructions to Gideon teach us about answered prayer and restored blessing for our lives?

13. Read 6:33–40. "Gideon's fleece" has often been used as a prayer lesson. What does verse 39 indicate about Gideon's faith? What does this indicate about God's grace?

14. Read 2 Corinthians 9:8. Why is a "fleece" unnecessary in our prayer lives?

"Faith isn't believing without proof – it's trusting without reservation."

-William Sloane Coffin

Spirit-led Prayers

Romans 8:1–27

The prophet Isaiah was speaking about Jesus when he said, “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” The same Holy Spirit that rested on Jesus, indwells Christians. When we pray, led by the Spirit, we can pray with wisdom and understanding because of his Holy counsel. We can pray with power and might, because the Holy Spirit has divine knowledge. Therefore, every prayer offered to God, should be led by his Holy Spirit.

Read Romans 8:1–27.

1. Romans 8, starts with the word “therefore,” which many theologians believe is referring to Chapters 3–7. Those chapters discuss the frustrations and limits of trying to live according to the Old Covenant Law, and the freedoms that were gained through the New Covenant promises. Paul’s statement in 8:1–2 is considered one of the best descriptions of the New Covenant ushered in by Christ. Describe the promised relationship between God and Christians. (8:1–2)

2. What rendered the law powerless, and how did God’s grace provide? (8:3)

3. How does a person today meet God’s “righteous requirement?” (8:4)

4. Describe the Spirit-led mind. (8:5–7)

5. The dictionary defines realm as a country that is ruled by a king or queen. From 8:8–9, who belongs to Christ?

6. Why are those who belong to Christ assured of salvation? (8:10–11)

7. While salvation is guaranteed to anyone who receives Christ, sanctification is a daily choice. Bishop Handley Moule said that sanctification “is not an ambition: it is a duty.” What is our Christian duty? (8:12–13)

8. Describe the relationship of a sanctified Christian with God. (8:14–17) Why is this relationship crucial to our prayer lives?

9. What is our promised hope and how should that impact our prayers? (8:18–25)

10. In the same way we hope for heaven, we can hope in prayer. Look carefully at verses 26 and 27. Why is God’s Holy Spirit vital to our prayer lives?

11. Read John 16:12–15. What is our great blessing when we pray a Spirit-led prayer? Why should every prayer time include moments to listen for God’s Holy Spirit to speak?

“In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart.”

-John Bunyon

Praying for Forgiveness

Psalm 51

Every Christian needs to know how to approach God and find forgiveness. David had abused his authority as king to bring Bathsheba into his home. The consequences of that sinful choice included the death of the child who was created in sin and the death of a man who was Bathsheba's faithful husband and David's faithful soldier. Nathan was the prophet who confronted David with his sin, reminding him that he was accountable to God. David wrote Psalm 51 to describe his prayer as he placed his sins before God and found forgiveness and restoration.

Read Psalm 51 – without stopping.

1. Why can we approach God and ask for his forgiveness? (v. 1)

2. What is forgiveness? (v. 2)

3. Why is there no such thing as a “victimless” or small sin? (vv. 3–4)

4. Read Romans 3:23. Why does everyone need God's forgiveness? (vv. 5–6)

12. David called the hill in Jerusalem where he planned to build the Temple, Zion, the place where God would dwell as King. Why is it important to pray for “Zion” today? (vv. 18–19)

“God’s forgiveness extends to the worst offenders and to anyone who wishes to receive it—not because of who we are, but because of who He is.”

-Charles Swindoll

Praying for God to Act

1 Kings 18

King Ahab was one of Israel's most powerful and damaging rulers. He was king of the Northern Kingdom for almost twenty years and, during that time, his leadership led to great spiritual decline. Ahab was the first Israelite king to marry a foreigner, Jezebel, and embrace heathen worship. Jezebel persuaded Ahab to build an altar to Baal and worship there. Life and ministry became difficult and dangerous for the true prophets of Jehovah God. God's blessing was withheld from Israel and, after three years of famine, God sent Elijah, his prophet, to remind the people there is only one, true God.

Read 1 Kings 18.

1. What was the word of the Lord to Elijah? How did Elijah respond? Vv. (1-2)
2. Glance at 1 Kings 17. How had Elijah survived the famine?
3. Who is Obadiah and what is his assigned duty from King Ahab? (vv. 2-6)
4. Describe the encounter between Obadiah and Elijah. (vv. 7-11)
5. Why is Obadiah concerned about Elijah's request? (vv. 12-14)

6. How does Elijah calm Obadiah's fears? (v. 15)

7. When God passed judgment on the people of the Northern Kingdom, how were the faithful impacted? What must we understand when we pray for God to act?

8. What should we learn from verse 16 about obeying and trusting God's call?

9. What is Elijah's prophetic role in King Ahab's life? (vv. 17-18) When we pray for God to act, what should we expect could be part of his answer to that prayer?

10. What does Elijah tell the King to do? (vv. 19-20)

11. What is God's message to the people of the Northern Kingdom, and how do they respond? (vv. 21-24) How does this passage reveal God's grace for his people?

12. The prophets of Baal do everything humanly possible to prove him as a god. Elijah does what he can to make his sacrifice humanly impossible. What point was Elijah making? (vv. 25-39) What is a true sacrifice for God?

13. What else does Elijah require of the people? (v. 40) Then, what does God require of Elijah? (vv. 41–46) What do these verses mean to our own requests for God to act?

“God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil.”

-E. M. Bounds

Praying for Physical and Spiritual Healing

Psalm 41

An elderly man was in the hallway, studying the board that listed prayer requests. When asked, “What are you up to,” he responded saying, “Just making sure my name isn’t on the board. If I’m not listed here, I know I’m okay!” We often pray for people who need physical healing. Sometimes we pray for people who need spiritual healing. It has been said Christians spend more time praying people out of heaven than out of hell. King David was older, ill, and felt less able to face the Goliaths in his life. But David knew that God’s strength and favor was the medicine he needed most. He prayed for his physical health to be restored, but he also prayed for spiritual help to strengthen his relationships with God and others.

Read Psalm 41.

1. According to David, who is blessed and why? (vv. 1-3) Why should this verse be read as a possibility rather than as a promise?

2. What should be considered in every prayer for a sick person? (v. 4)

3. David was king of a mighty nation. What did he recognize in some of those that came to “visit” him in his illness? (vv. 5-6)

4. Why might some people offer prayer requests, or even prayers, with wrong motives?

5. What had broken King David's heart? (vv. 7-9)

6. What are some of the most difficult challenges for a person who is dealing with a chronic or long-term illness? How should we pray for them spiritually, as well as physically?

7. What hinders someone from reaching out to a person who is gravely ill?

8. What is the source of King David's spiritual strength during this time? (vv. 10-11)

9. What is our personal responsibility during a time of physical ailment?

10. Look carefully at verse 12. What should we pray, for ourselves and for others, in a time of physical or spiritual crisis? Why?

11. Read James 5:13-16. Who should you ask to pray for you, during difficult times? Thinking about Psalm 41, why is this important for your life, and the lives of others?

12. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. What is the most important prayer for healing, that all Christians should pray for others?

“I venture to say that the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, with the exception of sickness. Sickness has frequently been more use to the saints of God than health has.”

-Charles Spurgeon

A Prayer of Praise

Psalm 103

The NIV Study Bible defines Christian praise as “the joyful thanking and adoring of God, the celebration of His goodness and grace.” One of the highest callings in prayer is to use our time with God to praise him. God didn’t request the praise of his people; he commanded that we praise him. God does not need our praise. Instead, He understood that we needed to adore him and remember his greatness in order to fully know and trust him as our King. David, the author of Psalm 103, knew the necessity and the joy of praising God. That is one of the reasons that God referred to King David as a man after his own heart.

Read/pray, Psalm 103, with praise in your own heart and soul.

1. The Old Testament understanding of “soul” is the inner living being of a person, rather than the being that has eternal existence. The root of the word soul can be found is the same word used for God breathing on dust to create a living being. Psalm 103 opens with David praising God with his soul. How does David praise God, with the essence of his very life? (vv. 1-2)

2. Consider your personal prayer life. When are you most likely to praise God? Do you feel like you have been obedient to God’s command to offer praise and remember his benefits?

3. How has God been good to the human race? (vv. 3-5)

4. How had God blessed Israel? (vv. 6–12)

5. How does God view and bless the faithful? (vv. 13–18)

6. How would you counsel someone from these verses if he or she was finding it difficult to praise God?

7. Why can we be confident in offering our praise to God? (v. 19)

8. The angelic host is called to join God's people in praise and worship to God. Read Psalm 91:1–13. What is the function of the angelic host in the life of a believer? What is David praising God for? (vv. 20–22)

9. Look up the following passages and list reasons to praise God:

Psalm 145:3

Revelation 4:11

Psalm 63:3–4

10. Now, take some time to offer God the praise He has commanded, because it is the praise our souls need to offer.

“The very act of praise releases the power of God into a set of circumstances and enables God to change them if this is His design... I have come to believe that the prayer of praise is the highest form of communication with God, and one that always releases a great deal of power into our lives.”

-Merlin Carothers

The Believer's Prayer

Acts 4:23–31

God calls and expects every Christian to develop a strong, believing prayer life. Billy Graham once said, ““Heaven is full of answers to prayer for which no one bothered to ask.” The early believers in the Christian faith were facing impossible odds. Their numbers were growing, but compared to the Roman government or the Jewish leaders, they seemed insignificant. But that is historically how God has chosen to make Himself known. If the Bible contained stories of great men's accomplishments it would not be a book of miracles. When Christians pray, God can ask the impossible and accomplish the impossible through those who will pray and believe. The believer's prayer is not limited by anything but the perfect will of God.

Peter and John were imprisoned after the healing of the lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful (Acts 3). The healing was a public spectacle, and the miracle was not in doubt. The Sanhedrin met to decide what to do with Peter and John. The eventual verdict was to allow the apostles' release and warn them not to speak of Jesus. Peter and John respectfully refused, saying, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God” (Acts 4:19). Peter and John left the Sanhedrin to return to the Upper Room and a small group of believers came together to pray.

Read Acts 4:23–31.

1. How did the people respond to the news Peter and John returned to tell? (vv. 23–24)

2. Why would prayer be the first priority?

3. What is their first expression of prayer? (v. 24)

4. What does the Holy Spirit remind them of as they pray? (vv. 25–26)

5. Why is it important to remember what God has done in the past, as you pray about the future? Do you have a specific example of this from your own prayer life?

6. How had recent history fulfilled earlier prophecy? (vv. 27–28)

7. Given the recent history, what would be the “rational” or “logical” possibilities to consider? Why would considering those possibilities have been a mistake?

8. What did the early believers pray for? (vv. 29–30)

9. How is this a lesson for your personal prayer life? For your church?

10. How does God respond to the prayers of this small group of believers? (31)

11. Read John 14:13–14. What did Jesus tell his disciples, shortly before his death and resurrection? What hinders our trust in his words?

12. How has this year's study of prayer deepened your personal prayer life? How does today's study challenge your prayer life?

“Prayer is the easiest and hardest of all things; the simplest and the sublimest; the weakest and the most powerful; its results lie outside the range of human possibilities—they are limited only by the omnipotence of God.”

-E. M. Bounds

A Constant Conversation

1 Thessalonians 5:12–28

1 Thessalonians is quite possibly the earliest of the Pauline epistles. Paul wrote the letter to encourage the early believers to live according to God's word and to endure the persecution the Jewish synagogue had threatened. Paul had received a vision from the Macedonian man, telling him to change directions and head west. Paul began establishing churches in strategic port cities, often traveled by both Jews and Gentiles. The church in Thessalonica grew rapidly and the Jewish leaders in the area worked quickly to attempt to discourage the growth. Paul concludes his letter by telling the people to take care of one another and to never stop praying.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–28.

1. How should the Church treat their leaders? (vv. 12–13)
2. How should the Church treat everyone? (vv. 14–15)
3. How should a Christian treat himself or herself? (vv. 16–18)
4. Do you think Paul is encouraging a high standard, or prescribing the Christian life? Explain your answer.

5. Think about verse 19 in conjunction with verses 16–18. How might we “put out the Spirit’s fire” or “quench the Holy Spirit?”

6. Now think about verse 19 in conjunction with verses 20–22. Again, how can we keep from quenching the Holy Spirit in our lives?

7. What does Paul pray for the Thessalonian believers? (vv. 23–24)

8. How is sanctification achieved? Why should that be something we pray for “without ceasing?”

9. Paul then issues a prayer request and some final instructions. What does Paul, and every Christian minister, need from the Church? (vv. 25–27)

10. What is the power and purpose of living a life of constant prayer? (v. 28)

11. Oswald Chambers said, “Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.” What have you learned this year about prayer that have become spiritual markers in your Christian life? Do you feel that “praying without ceasing” is problem or a privilege? What are your spiritual goals for the summer months ahead?

May the Lord bless you and fit you for “the greater work” of prayer.

