
PRAYER



ALLIANCE CHURCH

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“We all tend to prescribe the answers to our prayers. We think that God can come in only one way. But Scripture teaches us that God sometimes answers our prayers by allowing things to become much worse before they become better. He may sometimes do the opposite of what we anticipate. Yet it is a fundamental principle in the life and walk of faith that we must always be prepared for the unexpected when we are dealing with God.”

- D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“Praise and thanksgiving do not magically change my circumstances. They radically alter my viewpoint.”

- Jennifer Kennedy Dean

WEEK ONE

SUNDAY MESSAGE

MESSAGE TITLE

PASTOR

KEY PASSAGE(S)

NOTES

WEEK 1—DAY 1

READING: *Nehemiah 1*

We turn to prayer for many reasons. We pray to express thanksgiving, present requests to God, seek comfort, or intercede for a friend in need. Sometimes, prayer is our first response. Other times, it's our last resort. This wasn't the case for Nehemiah. To him, prayer was priority.

Let's set the stage. Years before Nehemiah 1, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar, a foreign king, to invade the spiritual and political capital, Jerusalem, and burn it to the ground. Jewish survivors were taken as captives to Babylon. Many years later, another king freed the Jews, and they returned to their homeland to rebuild the Temple, which functioned as the center of Jewish faith and life.

But there was a problem. The walls meant to protect the city and the temple were still broken and burned. This was unacceptable to the Jews, leaving them vulnerable to another invasion. It's at this moment we find Nehemiah receiving word concerning the vulnerability of the city and the temple.

Prayer was Nehemiah's first response, not his last resort. He didn't immediately rush to Jerusalem, nor did he act out in frustration. Nehemiah sat down, wept for days, fasted, and prayed before God (1:4).

Nehemiah was a person of action, a leader. We'll see this in coming chapters. Godly leadership doesn't begin with reaction, but with prayer. From this place of prayer, God directs our steps, which we will see as we continue to read Nehemiah.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Prayer was priority for Nehemiah. Can we say the same about ourselves? What can you do to make prayer a priority in your life?
2. What stands out to you from Nehemiah's prayer? Highlight verses and journal.

PRAYING WITH NEHEMIAH

WEEK 1—DAY 2

READING: *Nehemiah 1:5*

Someone once said, “We will accomplish little of eternal significance apart from prayer.” We learned yesterday that prayer was Nehemiah’s priority. The devastating news concerning the vulnerability of Jerusalem and the temple rocked his world, but his prayer life did not falter.

Nehemiah could’ve run to the King of Persia—the most powerful man in the world at the time—with a request to fortify the walls and protect the temple. But Nehemiah knew he needed to go before the King of the Universe before approaching any earthly king. When he began to pray, he didn’t lead with his requests. Nehemiah led with praise.

A principle of praise is vital to our prayer lives. What do we mean by this? A principle of praise means we begin our prayers by remembering and recalling God’s character and work in our world. Nehemiah models this in our Scripture reading for today, marveling at the amazing nature of God without being distracted by the things of this world.

When we remember and recall God’s character and work at the beginning of our prayers, we’re able to refocus and find confidence when we pray. It’s our praise that points us toward the solution to every problem: God.

Rick and Ruth Myers describe the importance of beginning prayer with praise in *31 Days of Praise*: “Our praise reminds us that before a mighty God our problems become molehills rather than mountains, opportunities instead of hindrances, and steppingstones instead of stumbling blocks.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What attribute of God speaks to your heart in this moment? His mercy? Wisdom? Power? Compassion? Righteousness? Any other?
2. The names of God encourage us in prayer, too. Names like Good Shepherd, Counselor, King, Provider, Advocate are some examples. What attribute can you remember and recall right now? Journal about the attribute and its significance in your life.

WEEK 1—DAY 3

READING: *Nehemiah 1:8-10*

There’s an old hymn called “Standing on the Promises.” Penned in 1886, the second verse goes like this: “Standing on the promises that cannot fail, When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, By the living Word of God I shall prevail, Standing on the promises of God.”

In Deuteronomy, God said if His people rebelled against Him, He would send them into exile (28:64). And now, the exile is over, and God’s promise is coming to pass in Nehemiah’s lifetime. Nehemiah was bold and confident in his prayers. Why? Because he remembered and recounted God’s promises to the Jewish people. We see this in verse eight and nine of today’s Scripture reading.

It’s powerful to pray the promises of God. They provide direction to our prayers and faith to our hearts. In Nehemiah’s case, they authored faith in God for the journey ahead. In the New Testament, Paul writes, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Ultimately, all God’s promises find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The salvation promised through Jesus is the ultimate proof that God is the great promise keeper.

As you spend time with God today, consider the following ways God’s promises show up in your life.

- Hebrews 4:14-16 - God’s mercy and grace
- Proverbs 3:5-8 - God’s guidance
- Romans 8:3 - God’s generosity toward us
- 1 Peter 5:7 - God’s compassion in all that troubles us
- Psalm 23:1 - God’s sufficiency for whatever we need
- 1 John 1:9 - God’s forgiveness
- Philippians 4:7 - God’s peace
- Ephesians 1:11 - God’s purposes for our lives are never thwarted

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What specific promises can you apply to your prayers?
2. How does using Scripture in your prayers build your faith? Journal your response.

WEEK 1—DAY 4

READING: *Nehemiah 2*

Nehemiah began his first recorded prayer in the month of Kislev (late November), but the answer to prayer we read today wasn't recorded until the month of Nisan (late March). This means Nehemiah prayed for four months before his prayer was answered. Whether it's two weeks, four months, or four years, waiting on God is difficult, but there is always an answer...and we must watch for it.

God can miraculously answer prayers, or He can work in ordinary ways through our obedient participation. Nehemiah's opportunity to go before the king required boldness and action. God provided the opportunity, but Nehemiah needed to seize it. Nehemiah 4:9 also records a prayer that required immediate action to resolve. As Nehemiah prayed in faith, he *responded in obedience*.

Nehemiah's prayers throughout the book are rapid-fire prayers. These rapid-fire prayers are speedy, short prayers sent to God. They're not fancy, well-spoken, nor may they incorporate praise and confession, but these prayers are still valid, nonetheless. A rapid-fire prayer acknowledges God at work in our daily life and our continued reliance upon him. It's an ongoing conversation with the Creator of the Universe. How amazing is that?

Watch for God at work because of your prayers, because God often works in ordinary ways through obedient participation. We might miss God's answers and provision. Sometimes, we may cynically say "God helps those who help themselves." And certainly, that perspective seems to apply to Nehemiah. But Susie Larson's definition in *Your Powerful Prayers* is spot on: "Prayer is God's primary purpose to develop intimacy with our Creator and participate with his purposes here on earth."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What temptations do you face while you wait for God to answer your prayers? What are you doing to stay faithful during this waiting period?
2. What are you learning about God in this waiting period?
3. Be attentive and ask God to reveal to you how he is at work in answer to your prayers. Keep a record or journal of what you pray for and the resulting answers.
4. Do any of your prayers require steps of obedience for God to work powerfully in your life?

WEEK 1—DAY 5

READING: *Nehemiah 5*

Private prayer is not the only example of prayer we see in Scripture. Nehemiah 9 shows a mass gathering of God's people as they read, teach, pray, and recommit their lives to the Living God. This communal form of prayer holds its own power and importance aside from praying in secret, like Jesus teaches in Matthew 6.

Scripture gives no specific rules, days, times, or amount of people that must be present for us to pray as a community. For example, James 5 tells us to confess our sins to one another and pray for each other. It's that simple! But whether we pray with one person, a small group, or in a large gathering, communal prayer remains an important practice for all followers of Jesus.

Just look at what happened when God's people gathered to pray together! In the presence of the Living God, they were convicted by their rebellion against God, the rebellion of their ancestors, but most importantly, they were moved by the mercy, grace, love, and kindness of God to their community and those who came before them.

The early church in Acts prayed for many things in their community: wisdom, courage, leadership, suffering, and comfort were some of the several. Praying with others gives a sense of unity and vision; from this comes increased faith. Other members in our community call to mind things we may have forgot, and we have the unique opportunity to repent and return to the Living God together.

God works in powerful unique ways through these communal expressions of prayer. How might we integrate this expression of prayer in our lives?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What fears do you have about praying with others?
2. Where in your life can you incorporate praying with others? With your spouse? Friend? Children? Small group?

WEEK TWO

“Be ready to see your eyes opened as you close them in prayer.”

- Priscilla Shirer

SUNDAY MESSAGE

MESSAGE TITLE

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PASTOR

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KEY PASSAGE(S)

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NOTES

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WEEK 2—DAY 1

READING: *John 17:1-5*

Jesus' life on earth was marked with prayer. He often withdrew Himself to be alone and pray. Very few of His prayers are recorded in Scripture, however, there is one recorded in John 17. We will meditate on John 17 this week as we read this prayer from Jesus.

After the Last Supper and before Gethsemane, Jesus begins this prayer. Here's what John MacArthur says about John 17: "[This prayer] plunges the readers into the unfathomable depths of the inter-Trinitarian communication between Father and the Son... The veil is drawn back, and the reader is escorted by Jesus Christ into the Holy of Holies, to the very throne of God."

We find Jesus' only request for Himself in the first five verses of John 17. He says, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you."

Notice *why* He wants to be glorified... "*that your Son may glorify you.*" What Jesus is asking for is this: I am on my way to the cross, the work you gave me to do. Would you accept my offering that eternal life might be secured for my sheep?

Isn't it telling that in His darkest hour the only request He has for Himself is, "Would you help me to bring You glory?" Could we say the same of our prayers? This is not to say that we should not pray for specifics as we go through hard things, but our primary prayer ought to be, "Would you help me to glorify you?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to glorify God?
2. How does our perspective shift when we pray for the glory of God?

PRAYING WITH JESUS

WEEK 2—DAY 2

READING: *John 17:6-11*

Picture this: A family has a tradition of giving homemade cards to one another for special occasions. Years later, after the kids have all moved out, the father now has a box filled with precious cards from the ones he loves most. If there is a fire in his home, that box is the first thing he would grab. Not because the artwork is ready for the Louvre, or the grammar is immaculate, but because the cards were given to him by those he loves the most.

In this 26-verse prayer, Jesus only prays about Himself for five verses. The rest of the prayer is for His Church. Jesus prays for us, because He loves us. But why does He love us?

Jesus loves us, because we are a gift that the Father has given Him! Jesus is overjoyed with His gift, and gladly gave *His* life to secure *our* eternal life. You are a gift given by the Father to Jesus. Let that soak in for a moment...

There are many, many other verses in the New Testament that echo this amazing truth. God the Father loved His Son so much that He gave Him us as a gift. Understanding this truth leads to awe, worship, and praise. Recognizing our identity as God's beloved should be the primary motivation for our prayer life.

REFLECTION QUESTION

1. We are considered a beloved gift. What does this say about your core identity as a believer?

WEEK 2—DAY 3

READING: *John 17:11-15*

It's safe to assume Jesus would pray for the most significant things. He didn't waste time praying for secondary things, especially in John 17. He looks at His disciples, He looks at us, and, knowing what we will face, prays for three things.

His first request is, "...Holy Father, *keep them in your name...* While I was with them, *I kept them in your name*, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and *not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction...*" The disciples might not have known who the "son of destruction" was. The term has ominous tones, but Jesus was referring to Satan.

Satan is alive and well, and he's hellbent on turning lives away from the Lord. At Jesus' birth, Satan tried to kill Him via Herod's proclamation. He tried to derail Jesus at the beginning of His ministry through temptation. He tried to derail Jesus' mission via Jesus' best friend. He filled the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. When Jesus ascended into heaven, Satan turned his attention toward Jesus' disciples.

The Church is at war with an enemy far superior to our own knowledge, strategy, wisdom, and power. We do not stand a chance on our own. Therefore, Jesus prays for us. Today, you *must* know that Jesus is praying for you. He is praying for your protection from Satan, the son of destruction.

And, as you reflect today, be assured that his prayers for you are always answered.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Does the enemy scare you? Why or why not?
2. How do you see your faith as being part of a spiritual war?

WEEK 2—DAY 4

READING: *John 17:17-19; 6-8*

Have you ever wondered what Jesus is doing today? He is praying. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Consequently, he can save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

We may think, “That’s nice. He’s resting as he waits for the second coming. Maybe He just needs to kill time.” But do we really think Jesus is “killing time”? Or even doing something less than critical for His Kingdom’s sake? Nope! Jesus saved us, but it’s His prayers that keep us saved. Have you ever wondered what exactly Jesus prays for when He prays for you? He clearly isn’t praying for us to win the lottery.

In verse 17, Jesus prays, “Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth.” Often our prayers are miles away from Jesus’ prayer for our sanctification. Comforts, health, blessings, success, and sunny days tend to fill our prayers. Jesus knew that His disciples would face life with all its trials and temptations. He knows that to make it, we will need spiritual maturity. The greatest thing we could ever pray to acquire is *spiritual maturity*.

When we see inconveniences, suffering, trials, and temptations through His eyes, we steward them as we were meant to, bringing Him glory. This is a wonderful example of God’s sovereignty and our free will working together. We must avail ourselves to His truth to be sanctified. However, God is the one who sanctifies us—not us. And that is good news.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Imagine Jesus praying for you. What comes to mind? What questions do you have?
2. Is there a certain aspect of Christ-like living that you would like to grow in? Pray for that now.

WEEK 2—DAY 5

READING: *John 17:20-26*

When it comes to his Church, Jesus prays for three things: Protection from the evil one, spiritual maturity, and unity. But what does “unity” mean? And what does it look like in the Church?

Some may look at the number of Christian denominations and assume that Jesus’ third request was not answered. But Jesus didn’t have denominational differences in mind as He prayed. In fact, there was only one denomination for the first 1,000 years of church history. Does this mean that the Church was unified for those first 1000 years? Not at all!

Jesus prayed that His Church would “be one” like He and the Father are one. Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit have existed in an environment of selfless, pure, encouraging, joyful, love from eternity. The Church is supposed to reflect that environment.

The unity Jesus prays for isn’t unity for unity’s sake. It goes much deeper than that. Notice its purpose in verse 22: “...So that the world will know and believe.” This is not a command for us to follow. It’s a prayer request from Jesus to His Father. The genuine love we have for one another will be our greatest witness to Jesus and his Kingdom. When we obey the Spirit, we experience this unity, not because we are trying, but because Jesus is praying for it! And the world takes notice.

Can you imagine attending a church like this? How might such a church change the world? As you reflect, ask God to create a community like that in your church.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you experienced the kind of Christian community described above?
2. How should we handle differences and disagreements while still maintaining unity?

“I pray because I’m helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn’t change God. It changes me.”

- C.S. Lewis

WEEK THREE

SUNDAY MESSAGE

MESSAGE TITLE

PASTOR

KEY PASSAGE(S)

NOTES

WEEK 3—DAY 1

READING: *II Thessalonians 1:11-12*

Nehemiah taught us to prioritize prayer. But who-or what-is the priority of our prayers? The answer to this question tells us all we need to know about our true intentions with prayer.

Between church planting, preaching, disciple-making, writing, prison ministry, and council work, Paul's calendar was quite full. He could've prayed for strength, joy, rest, personal communion with God, etc. However, to Paul, prayer was not primarily a spiritual discipline to exercise, a tool to strengthen his own soul, or an end in and of itself. Paul's priority in prayer was *others*.

Can you imagine? Paul's schedule is loaded and yet the priority of his prayers is those around him. Could we say the same?

Paul saw prayer a way to intercede for those in his community. We see this in our Scripture reading today. Imagine if the priority of your prayers was a friend, family member, or someone you met on the street—that "the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified" and that our God would "fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power" in them?"

Let's take some inventory. The only way to go forward is to know where we are. Take a few minutes to pray about praying. An impactful request made by the disciples to Jesus was, "Teach us to pray." Let's request the same. Confess to the Lord your desire to pray as He taught us. Ask Him to teach you, and from there, discover the priority of your prayers.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What topic occupies most of your prayers?
2. Who is the main character of your prayers?
3. Why do you pray? Journal your response.

PRAYING WITH PAUL

WEEK 3—DAY 2

READING: *II Thessalonians 2:17-3:13*

There can be multiple reasons why we pray for others: duty, integrity, guilt, personal spiritual growth, etc. Paul loved the Thessalonians. His prayers for them were profound. The truth is, we pray most fervently and regularly for those that we love. The greatest motivation that drives our God is love. We cannot pray deeply for someone that we do not deeply love.

Of course, we may pray for people we don't know, like missionaries or political figures, but compare that with how we pray for family or friends. The tone and intensity of our prayers changes, doesn't it? That's what happens when we pray for those we love.

When you pray for those you love, what are your most prominent requests? If you believe health is primary, your prayers will be inundated with requests for health. If you desire comfort, your prayers will reflect that. These are not necessarily wrong things to pray for, but, unfortunately, they tend to dominate our prayer life. What is important to you will reveal itself in prayer.

If you read Paul's prayers, the primary desire of his heart is for the spiritual growth and perseverance of those he loved.

It is important to remember that those Paul prayed for were often persecuted, going through trials, or facing poverty. Of course, he was facing the same, yet his prayers for them were filled with requests—that they may know God's love, that they may understand Christ's power, and that they may live out their identity in Jesus.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When you pray for those you love, what are your most prominent requests?
2. What Scripture can you use in your prayers as you pray for your loved ones?

WEEK 3—DAY 3

READING: *Ephesians 3:14-21*

In his book *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, D.A. Carson refers to a time when he was very sick as a child. When his fever broke, he woke up and noticed his mother sitting next to him praying with a tear-stained face.

He goes on to mention that if, before this incident, anybody would have ever asked him if his parents loved him, he would've said yes. However, after the illness, his parent's love took on a much deeper meaning than before. Carson's mom obviously loved him before this illness, but he did not fully grasp it until after.

As a believer, you know you are loved by God. But is it possible that you have no idea how *much* you are loved by Him? To come to grips with a greater understanding and experience of God's love will create a deeper love for Him, developing a maturity, confidence, and security in his love. But, according to Paul's prayer, such an understanding is not simply a product of discipline or study but a work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul prays that the Ephesians "will have power to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:19).

"Being filled with all the fullness of God" is another way of saying "spiritual maturity." Of course, spiritual maturity comes through a study of Scripture, but not that alone. Spiritual growth is a spiritual event. You cannot force it, fake it, nor manipulate it. Paul knows spiritual maturity comes in degrees corresponding with one's understanding of God's love. Such understanding is a work of the Spirit's power.

Paul does not desire behavior modification. He does not want believers to behave. He wants them to become! The only behavior he desires is one that stems from a deep immersion in the love of God. Anything else would border on legalism.

We need to pray, not to simply change behavior or adhere to "professional Christianity," but to have a deep encounter with the love of God; a love that is limitless, powerful, and the only enduring source of life change.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How would understanding how much God loves you help you grow in your spiritual maturity?
2. Why is it easier to pray for behavior change in others versus praying for them to understand how deeply God loves them?

WEEK 3—DAY 4

READING: *Ephesians 6:10-20*

First-century prisons were not concerned about the safety, dignity, or well-being of the prisoners. You were guilty until proven innocent. If your family wished to supply meager comforts, they *might* be allowed to do so. Otherwise, you were on your own.

If you were unjustly imprisoned and had the opportunity to request prayer, what would be your request? How would your request change if you knew that God answers the prayers of others on your behalf?

Look again at Ephesians 6:18-20. Paul is in chains in a first-century prison. What is his request? Read it again: “That words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Was his request honored? In Philippians 4:21-23, Paul concludes another prison epistle. Look what he says... “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.”

Paul refers to saints in “Caesar’s household.” How were there saints in Caesar’s household? Paul was in prison in Rome awaiting trial before none other than Caesar himself, but would regularly run into Roman guards who also served in the palace. Those individuals shared with others in the palace what they learned from Paul!

Paul was not bemoaning his unjust situation as he waited to be released. He had work to do! And he did it. One of the greatest prayer requests for ourselves is that we would see the “prisons” of our lives as opportunities from God to build His kingdom.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is “holding you back” from living your best life?
2. How might God want to use your “prisons” as opportunities to serve Him?

WEEK 3—DAY 5

READING: *I Corinthians 1:1-8*

It’s interesting to note that Paul begins his prayers with thanksgiving. He does not thank God for a list of things separate from his concerns. He expresses thanksgiving for those he’s concerned for—the “difficult people” in his life.

In fact, Paul is even thankful for the Corinthians. The Corinthian church was not a traitor per se, but they certainly seemed wayward. Paul addressed their lawsuits, tolerance of sexual immorality, pride, selfishness, insensitivity to the poor, jealousy, disunity, arrogance, and selfishness. However, he begins the letter by letting them know how genuinely *thankful* he is for them. He doesn’t begin by listing everything that’s difficult about them. Paul is not thankful for all they do, nor does he dismiss it, but he does know a couple of things:

Paul knows the Corinthians had very real encounters with the grace of God. He knows the Holy Spirit claimed them and took residence in them. He knows that though they used to live separated from God, they now are His children. Yes, they need to be challenged—and Paul will be the one to do so—but if the Holy Spirit dwells within them, there is always incredible hope.

Difficult people will often drive us to our knees. But that’s a good thing. Before we begin to list our grievances about someone, how good would it be to spend time meditating on what God has already done—what they’ve heard; who they have in their circle; His promises for them; His commitment to them, and His love manifested through Christ among them. Therefore, when it comes to praying for difficult people, may thanksgiving lead the way.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. We all struggle with difficult people, and it would do us well to remember we are difficult, too! What are some things you can thank God for in the middle of a difficult relationship?
2. Using Paul’s example of prayer for the Corinthians, what can you pray for regarding this difficult person?

“Prayers outlive the lives of those who uttered them; outlive a generation, outlive an age, outlive a world. Prayer should not be regarded as a duty which must be performed, but rather a privilege to be enjoyed.”

- E.M. Bounds

WEEK FOUR

SUNDAY MESSAGE

MESSAGE TITLE

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PASTOR

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KEY PASSAGE(S)

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NOTES



WEEK 4—DAY 1

READING: *1 Samuel 1:1-9*

Hannah's life was not exactly "peaceful." Outside of her home, "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). In other words, there was chaos. Israel had no leadership, no absolutes, and a messy priesthood. Hannah's husband had a second wife, Peninnah. Peninnah was able to have children, but due to infertility, Hannah was not. Jealousy ran rampant, keeping tensions high between the two.

But Hannah had her husband's true love. Peninnah did not. When Hannah's husband asked if his love was worth more than motherhood, Hannah remained silent. Motherhood was a big deal in ancient Israel. Motherhood marked the potential fulfillment of the Messianic prophesy. Think about that: *Any woman at any point could give birth to the Messiah!* But Scripture mentions twice that "the Lord had closed [Hannah's] womb..."

Hannah knew God was *allowing* her infertility... We can only imagine that made the situation even more unbearable. It's hard to see God bless others while withholding from us. While others may not be as obnoxious as Peninnah, the constant reminders still hurt. Resentment sets in. We feel set aside by God—humiliated, even.

But Hannah responds in humility. Humility is a choice (James 3:13). Hannah trusts God, and as we read more about her this week, we'll see God didn't set her aside but set her apart in preparation for His plans and purposes.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it hard to believe in God's goodness when He doesn't give you what you desperately want?
2. How can you trust God when surrounded by constant reminders of something you lack? What might God teach you through them?

PRAYING WITH HANNAH

WEEK 4—DAY 2

READING: *1 Samuel 1:9-16*

Hannah, in her pain, went straight to the temple to pray. Eli, the priest at the time, saw her pray in desperation, but accused her of being drunk. He even implied Hannah was an alcoholic. But Hannah was broken-hearted, not drunk, and she came to give her heart to the Lord.

This is the only recorded instance in Scripture of an individual praying in private within the sanctuary. The Temple was a holy site for Jews, and the fact that Hannah was a woman—someone considered second class—with an offering that was not grain nor an animal, but a broken heart, emphasizes how much God honors and cares about our own broken hearts.

Hannah once again responded with humility. Despite Eli's initial accusations, God used him to pronounce a blessing on her. God reminds us in Psalm 34 that he is close to the brokenhearted. In Psalm 51, we're told God honors our brokenness as a sacred offering. And the prophet Isaiah writes that God sent the Messiah, Jesus, to heal the brokenhearted.

Broken hearts provide fertile soil for God to do redemptive work. He displays His goodness and power *if* we are willing to trust Him with our broken pieces. There's a Japanese form of art called Kintsugi. Kintsugi takes shattered pottery and puts the broken pieces back together with gold. Though the pottery was shattered, Kintsugi takes broken pieces and creates something beautiful. God can do the same with our hearts.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think a broken heart is so honored by God?
2. Mother Theresa once said, "The way to humility is by embracing humiliation." How do you see this principle at work in Hannah? Why does God value humility, especially in our prayers?

WEEK 4—DAY 3

READING: *1 Samuel 1:9-28*

When Hannah prays at the tabernacle, she makes a vow, saying, "O Lord Almighty, if you give me a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life." First of all, vows are a big deal in Scripture. God is a promise keeper, and He never goes back on His vows. As people made in His image, our vows should hold the same weight.

So, what was Hannah's vow about? Why would she ask God for something she desperately wants and then give it back to Him? Because her vow symbolizes a love for God above all else...even her desire for a son. Hannah surrenders *everything* she holds dear to God, desiring God's purposes to stand, not her own. In her surrender, God supplies her with the peace she needs to move forward.

Two verses later, she became pregnant. One may assume God answered her prayer immediately. But when we read carefully, we see the words "in the course of time." A significant amount of time passed before her request became a reality. Until then, each day was a new day to surrender her hopes and dreams all over again.

Every day after Samuel's birth, she surrendered again. How easy it would have been to say, "Lord, your temple is defiled. I can do a better job of raising him to love you!" But Scripture says, "After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was...and brought him to the house of the Lord."

Hannah kept her vow, symbolizing her faith in God, the giver of her gift. May we have the same kind of faith in Him.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. As you give requests to God in prayer, what might He ask you to surrender in order for Him to work powerfully in your life?
2. We may think surrender is a "one and done" thing, but why would it be necessary to surrender our desires to God daily?
3. How does "surrender" show humility?

WEEK 4—DAY 4

READING: *1 Samuel 2:1-11, Philippians 4:4-7*

As Hannah fulfilled her vow to the Lord, she responded in joy, saying, "My heart rejoices in the Lord. I delight in your deliverance. There is no one like you!"

This prayer is often compared to another mother's prayer in Luke 1: The Magnificat. Mary, mother of Jesus, prayed the Magnificat when she was pregnant with Jesus. The births of Mary and Hannah's sons continue to impact people, nations, and our world even today.

At the time, Hannah had no idea how God planned to use her son, Samuel. Even so, she begins her prayer by rejoicing in God's redemptive purposes, modeling how we should also rejoice when we begin our prayers to God.

Notice that Hannah's joy is not rooted in Samuel, nor in her husband's love, not even in the wealth of her family, but in *God*. Her source of joy is her relationship with God, rooted in the unchanging rock of love and salvation.

Often our prayers reflect our temporal needs. What if we became so focused on the eternal gifts of joy we have in God rather than temporal needs? What might our lives look like?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Satan can't steal our salvation, but he can steal our joy. How could you cultivate more joy in your life?
2. How does the humility enhance joy?

WEEK 4—DAY 5

READING: *Isaiah 55:8-9*

God always answers prayer. But here's the thing: We don't get to tell Him how to answer. The question then becomes, *can we trust Him with the answer?* When Hannah desperately prayed for a son, she didn't know how God would answer. She didn't know God would use Samuel to lead her people into a new era of prophecies and miracles.

Just like Hannah's prayers, our prayers become part of the bigger story God continues to write in our world. Think about it! Joseph wanted justice and freedom from prison. God made him a prime minister to save a nation. David was determined to build God a temple. God built the Messianic legacy. Sarah prayed for a son. God birthed a nation. Daniel wanted relief from nightmares. God gave a vision for the entire history of the world. Paul wanted released from prison to preach the Good News. God commissioned him to write the New Testament epistles *in prison*.

God longs to do so much more than just give us what we want. He wants to do exceedingly more than we can ever ask or imagine! But God is looking for people that trust Him; people who trust even when plans don't work out. In his book, *The Praying Life*, Paul Miller says that God often uses prayer to write the story He wants to weave through our lives and human history.

As we pray, can we trust God to write these stories?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When has God given you something better than what you asked for?
2. Why is an eternal perspective important when praying?
3. Why is humility an important quality to be able to embrace God's answers to your prayers?

“God answers our prayers not because we are good, but because He is good.”

- A. W. Tozer

WEEK FIVE

SUNDAY MESSAGE

MESSAGE TITLE

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PASTOR

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KEY PASSAGE(S)

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WEEK 5—DAY 1

READING: *Luke 11:5-13*

Observing the way Jesus prays, the disciples say, “Lord, teach us to pray...” Jesus shares with them what we know today as “The Lord’s Prayer” or the “Our Father.” Jesus follows this prayer with a parable. In this parable, Jesus communicates truths about prayer.

The parable begins with someone banging on their neighbor’s door in the middle of the night. The neighbor tells the person to come back tomorrow, but the person doesn’t give up until the man gives him what he needs. When it comes to prayer, we could all identify with the person at the door as we urgently bang on heaven’s door.

But that’s not the point of the parable. Let’s backtrack a minute. Who else is in the house with the neighbor? His children. For those of us who are parents, when our child needs something at night, do we tell them to wait until tomorrow? No. We respond immediately. In *Moments with the Savior*, Ken Gire says this about the parable: “The ultimate point is to clarify our relationship with God. We are not the desperate friend knocking outside the door; we are the beloved children on the inside.”

Jesus tells us to pray to “our Father.” In the instruction after the parable, we are told that if our earthly fathers—as imperfect as they are— mostly desire to give us what we need, how much more will our Heavenly Father want to give generously to us? As we enter a new week on prayer, let’s remember that the purpose of prayer is for relationship with our Heavenly Father.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What was your earthly father like? Does your relationship with your earthly father make it easier or harder for you to pray to your Heavenly Father?
2. How do you become a child of God? See John 3:16 and 1 John 3:1-3

PRAYING WITH THE DISCIPLES

WEEK 5—DAY 2

READING: *Luke 18:1-8*

Jesus describes an encounter between an unjust judge and a vulnerable widow. Although there's no one to uphold her case, she is persistent. And because of her persistence, the unjust judge finally administers justice. The point of the parable is this: If an unworthy judge with no obligation to address right or wrong is compelled by persistence to deal justly with a helpless individual, how much more will God, the ultimate just Judge and our loving Heavenly Father, *rush* to meet our needs?

If the passage concludes that God rushes to meet our needs, why does He seem to take so much time? If God doesn't require badgering, then what's the purpose of persistent prayer? Here's the thing: From God's eternal perspective, He *is* responding immediately (Isaiah 65:24). From our temporal perspective, He seems to be taking His time. We have no idea what is going on behind the scenes while we pray, and that's why we are not to give up.

Prayer is God's instrument to activate His work in the world. Let's ask another question; if prayer is about relationship, why are we tempted to treat God like a cosmic vending machine? We want what we want, but God desires relationship. Persistent prayer encourages the development of this relationship. If answers came easily, we could very well lose interest not only in praying, but in God.

Persistence produces a mature prayer life. As we continually bring requests before God, we are led to consider our priorities, motives, and even potential consequences if God answers those prayers.

We live in a world of instant gratification, but God makes us wait. We like easy over difficult, deliverance over refinement. Yet endurance and persistence are intrinsic to the Christian life. The apostle Paul says in Romans that without endurance, there is no hope. James, the brother of Jesus, adds that persistence brings about maturity. In Matthew, Jesus tells us that endurance is *necessary* in order to claim the victory over evil.

And, most importantly, persistence in prayer is important because it imitates a persistent God; a God who never gives up on us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are you learning about yourself and about God as you wait for God to answer your prayers?
2. When do you think it is time to stop asking God for something you have been praying about?

WEEK 5—DAY 3

READING: *Matthew 7:7-12*

If you grew up in church, perhaps you saw photos of Jesus knocking on a door and caption underneath that read, "Ask, seek, knock."

Scripture tells us to ask for whatever is on our hearts. Jesus Himself tells us to ask God for whatever we want and God will answer us. It seems too good to be true. Are there conditions? Yes, there are conditions. We must pray according to His will and against hindrances that undermine the answers to our prayers. However, God is a generous God. Matthew 7:7-12 tells us God's intentions toward us are generous.

But here's the thing: To ask, seek, and knock is not about wanting more of something, but more of *someone*. It's not about wanting marriage, children, financial freedom, health, a better job—as legitimate as these things are. They point to the bigger need, which is the need to know if God's love is enough. Above all else and in the deepest places in our hearts, we need to know more of God.

God is our true home. That is why we pray. God answers our specific requests, and that is wonderful. We give Him glory and many times it strengthens our faith, but all of that is secondary. John 10:10 reminds us that our quest for abundant life is found in Him alone.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can you experience more of God in your life?
2. What does Philippians 4:7 say is God's answer to your requests?

WEEK 5—DAY 4

READING: *Luke 18:8-14*

Author Kelly Minter says, “Sin is a matter of opinion, not legislation. We don’t like to be hemmed in by rigid constraints. Instead, we embrace the idea that we are basically good people and should be left alone to define our own morality, our own personal truth.”

God tells us to confess our sins, not to shame or punish us, but to heal and help us change. Unconfessed sin is often a controlling force in our lives that prevents God from blessing our prayers (Psalm 66:18). We don’t have the right to define sin. Only God determines sin and reveals its gravity. It’s easy to be blind to our faults, just as the Pharisee was in the parable we read today.

Ironically, the hero of this parable is the reviled tax collector—the one who confessed to being the worst and needing the most forgiveness. He realized his only hope in life is God’s generous mercy and forgiveness. God’s forgiveness is what humanity needs, and what Jesus came to accomplish.

We can’t appreciate Jesus’ forgiveness if we think our sin barely needed it in the first place. We find it hard to forgive others when we do not see our own need. Romans 2:4 says “God’s kindness leads you toward repentance...” Isn’t that amazing! It’s not His anger nor punishments, but His kindness that causes us to return to Him.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is confession an important part of prayer?
2. Why is it important to forgive those who hurt you?

WEEK 5—DAY 5

READING: *Mark 9:21-29*

Mark records an encounter with a father who has trouble believing Jesus can heal his son. He wants to believe, but acknowledges his doubts. Does he doubt whether Jesus has the power to heal his son? Maybe he does, but does Jesus even care enough to do so?

Trust is not built overnight. It often takes time and investment. A vital way to build trust is this: pursue Jesus by bringing doubts before Him. Our doubts don’t scare the Lord, and they shouldn’t scare us. Jesus further clarifies in Matthew, “If you have faith like a mustard seed... nothing will be impossible for you.” Think about that. Just a tiny seed of faith has the power to move mountains in our lives.

In this account, Jesus rebuked his disciples because they trusted in their own abilities, but not in Jesus Himself. Are you trusting in yourself? Others? A formula? Your plans? Your efforts? We may feel we deserve His help because of our efforts. Either way we end up not believing in Jesus, but in the lies of the enemy.

Romans 10:17 gives us instruction on where to receive greater faith. It says, “Faith comes through hearing, and hearing through the Word of God.” God’s Word is truth, and learning more about His promises help us combat the lies we are prone to believe. The more we spend time centering ourselves on the words of Jesus, the more our faith can grow.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What lie do you struggle with when it comes to your faith and how God answers your prayers?
2. When has God’s Word helped you grow in your faith?
3. Reflect on the following quote by Elizabeth Elliot, a missionary whose husband was killed by the people they had come to work with: “Faith does not eliminate doubts, but faith knows where to take them.”

WEEK SIX

“The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”

- Samuel Chadwick

SUNDAY MESSAGE

MESSAGE TITLE

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PASTOR

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KEY PASSAGE(S)

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WEEK 6—DAY 1

READING: *Joshua 7:6-13*

After a major victory over Jericho, the Israelites come across the much smaller city of Ai. Confident in God's promises, they sent a limited number of troops...and got soundly beaten. The defeat caught the Israelites off guard. Why did this happen? Joshua and the elders go to prayer.

After a full day of prayer, God comes to them and says, "What are you doing? Get off your knees. This is not the time to pray." Did you know there are times when prayer is *not* the solution? Or that there are times when God commands you *not* to pray?

Israel disobeyed a clearly stated directive from God. They thought that 90% obedience was enough. God said His blessings are not for those who "walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers, but instead for those who 'delight in the law of the Lord'" (Psalm 1:1-2).

If someone is disobedient to God's Word, it's proper to pray for repentance and salvation. That's it. To pray that God would send His blessings on those who are disobedient is to make a mockery of prayer. Prayer is not a way to gain comfort, convenience, and victory for our own sake.

If you pray for blessings on one that is not in union with Christ, God might be telling you to get up off your knees. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." If you pray for blessings on yourself or others while outside the will of God, He may tell you to get off your knees. It's not the time to pray—there is sin in the camp.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Is there an area of disobedience in your life that you are "hiding" from God? How does it affect your prayers?
2. What would obedience look like for you?

PRAYING WITH THE DISILLUSIONED

WEEK 6—DAY 2

READING: *Lamentations 3:1-33*

Babylon's army surrounded Jerusalem. They claimed it would be better for the inhabitants of the city if they surrendered, but Israel refused. The Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem for the next three years. The prophet Jeremiah survived the horror of those three years, but he did not survive unscathed. In the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah walks among the smoldering rubble. How do you pray when facing the horrors of this world? Jeremiah models this well.

First, he was honest. He felt the pain and gave voice to it. He recognized that God could have stopped this from happening but, in His sovereignty, didn't. Jeremiah was haunted by what he experienced, but says these words in Lamentations 3: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

Jeremiah "calls to mind." This is huge, because Jeremiah's heart is breaking. However, he does not listen to his heart, he speaks to it! He does not allow pain to have the final word. His emotion does not define reality, God's promises do. Pain can destroy one's faith. Jeremiah lets us know the secret to praying in pain: Do not deny the hurt that happened. However, we need to "call to mind" what we know to be true. We need to talk to our heart, not listen to it.

These two responses, honesty and calling to mind, keep our prayer lives afloat in pain.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does the prophet Jeremiah give us hope and perspective amid tragedy?
2. Where do you feel disillusioned in your life? With what in God's Word can you remind yourself to give you hope?

WEEK 6—DAY 3

READING: *II Corinthians 12:1-10*

Paul was a prayer warrior, but even prayer warriors still don't always receive what they ask for. Paul describes a "thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me" in his writings. There's much speculation over the identity of Paul's thorn. Some believe it was a physical ailment and others speculate it was a human enemy of Paul. Whatever the identity, the thorn was identified with Satan himself.

Paul prayed the thorn would go away. There was no question in his mind that God had the power to remove it, so he prayed for deliverance, healing, and reprieve. Didn't God know that Paul could accomplish so much more for the kingdom without this thorn? And remember, this thorn was from Satan! Surely, it would bring God glory to remove it. But God still said no.

God's goal for Paul was far beyond how much kingdom-work he could produce. God used this thorn to keep Paul dependent upon Jesus. God used this thorn to keep Paul humble. God used this thorn to make sure Paul would never go astray. An answer to this prayer would have resulted in Paul's falling away from Christ. Of course, Paul had no way of knowing that, but God did.

Sometimes, for no apparent reason, God says no. But we need to keep in mind that the lack of a reason is just apparent. There truly is a reason, though we may know nothing of it. It is at that point that we trust Him.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the "thorns" in your life?
2. How can you find ways to be grateful for God's "no" to your prayers?

WEEK 6—DAY 4

READING: *II Chronicles 20:1-12*

Jehoshaphat was ruling Judah well. His nation turned back to God, and he sent disciples to point people to God. But right in the middle of revival, war broke out. Judah was attacked by Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites. These three enemies were worse than any other because they were family, Judah's distant cousins. Their combined firepower was superior to Judah's. They should be defenders, not attackers of his nation.

Sometimes trouble comes as a test, not judgment. The impending crisis could very well end in devastation, and though Jehoshaphat was afraid, he sought the Lord.

Jehoshaphat's prayer functions as a model for those facing hopeless situations. The Moabites may not surprise us, but a bad health prognosis may. The Ammonites may not come against us, but a substantial relationship crisis may. The Edomites may not challenge our lives, but a financial hurricane may. Jehoshaphat ends his prayer with, "We are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

Each of these sentiments are critical for prayer in crisis:

1. *I am powerless against this crisis.* "The answer can't be found in me. I do not have the strength or resources to defend myself."
2. *I do not know what to do.* "God, I don't even have a proposed solution. This issue is so great, I have no idea what to do. I don't have a plan."
3. *But my eyes are on you.* "You alone have the ability, and I will trust You through this crisis. I will trust You for strength and Your will to be done."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does Jehoshaphat's prayer encourage you?
2. What kinds of things help keep your eyes on God during a crisis?

WEEK 6—DAY 5

READING: *Deuteronomy 3:23-29*

Moses moved mountains. Moses confronted Pharaoh, worked miracles, led his people out of slavery, and meditated on the Ten Commandments. But Moses, like almost every spiritual leader, put up with a lot of messy people.

At one point in their journey to the Promised Land, the Israelites were grumbling because they couldn't find clean water. God gave Moses a very specific command. God would receive the glory for His provision if Moses obeyed, but Moses' anger got the best of him, and he altered God's plan. This decision made Moses look like the provider. The consequence? Moses would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Instead, Joshua would have the privilege to lead Israel in.

This hurt Moses. He lived for the day when he would lead Israel into the Promised Land. And now it was taken from him. He prays, "Please let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon." But the Lord said, "Enough from you; do not speak to me of this matter again."

Moses wanted one thing from God, but God said no. Yes, Moses sinned, but the consequence was beyond unbearable. Moses had served God so faithfully. Why couldn't God just forgive him?

We can't confuse forgiveness with an absence of consequences. The two are not the same. When we face consequences for our own sin, we may plead with God to reverse them. And He may. Often, He will not. Many give up on God at this point. But if we follow the rest of the book of Deuteronomy, we see that Moses continued to pray passionately. He continued to be faithful. Though God wouldn't reverse the consequences, Moses was going to be faithful to his God.

Could we say the same of our lives when God says no?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between forgiveness and reaping the consequences of a behavior/decision?
2. How did God show mercy to Moses in this instance?
3. How often do you blame God for experiencing the natural consequences of your disobedience?

“We may experience times of unusual closeness when every prayer is answered...and we may experience “fog time” when God stays silent, when nothing works according to the formula and all the Bible’s promises seem glaringly false. Fidelity involves learning to trust that beyond the fog, God still reigns and has not abandoned us.”

- Philip Yancey

WEEK SEVEN

SUNDAY MESSAGE

MESSAGE TITLE

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PASTOR

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KEY PASSAGE(S)

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WEEK 7—DAY 1

READING: *James 5:17 & 1 Kings 19:3-9*

Elijah is an Old Testament prophet who lived in Israel approximately 850 B.C. Renowned for various miracles—notably, raising the dead—Elijah is one of the two human beings who never really died, but was taken up to heaven by an angelic host and a fiery whirlwind (2 Kings 2).

Elijah was so revered that Malachi 4 prophesies that he'd prepare the way for the Messiah. Even Jesus Himself said, "John the Baptist ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah." Some biblical scholars think Elijah will make a final appearance at the end of time before Christ returns.

Elijah sounds extraordinary, right? How many people have we met that performed miracles and never died? But James 5:17 "Elijah was a man just like us." Really?

When we read his story, we see Elijah wrestles with insecurity. 1 Kings 19 also mentions a struggle with depression. It's tempting to put people like Elijah on a pedestal, and we may think God is more available for them in ways that don't apply to us today. We make excuses like, "I could never be like Elijah. God would never use me that powerfully in prayer." We apply unrealistic standards to Elijah and set lower ones for ourselves.

Elijah had limitations just like us, but that didn't stop God from using Elijah, and it won't stop God from using us. In her Bible study, Priscilla Shirer says, "While Elijah is an example for us, he is not an exception to us. None of the biblical heroes were intended to be an exception; they all are meant to be examples to us of what happens when an ordinary life intersects with an extraordinary God."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Who do you put on a pedestal? Think of how they influenced you and thank God for them. Pray for them to stay strong.
2. In what areas do you need to trust that God will hear your prayers and work in your life despite your limitations?

PRAYING WITH ELIJAH

WEEK 7—DAY 2

READING: *1 Kings 17:1-24*

Elijah's miracle answer to prayer on Mount Carmel is affirmed by three major world religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. But Elijah didn't just wake up one day and pray for this dramatic miracle. His bold prayer was the tip of an iceberg, the result of a life lived faithfully in obscurity and hardship.

Each unique season of Elijah's life gave him opportunities to experience God in distinct ways—as provider, protector, and promise keeper. His time-tested relationship with God laid the foundation for the events of Mount Carmel.

1 King 17:1 says Elijah was from Gilead. Gilead was a rugged, back water region on the margins of society, but Gilead was where Elijah came to know God. And when Elijah—a man from the margins—stood before the king, he most certainly didn't fit in at the palace. But his marginalized context prepared him to obey God's call to revolt against the evil of his day.

Not surprisingly, Elijah's prayers for drought were reviled by those in power. Prayers that bring hardship to a community aren't usually well received. After confronting the king, Elijah was on the run for three years.

Elijah lived with the consequences of his prayer and confrontation with power. He was unpopular, and even struggled to find a reliable water supply. He fled to a faraway place called Keith where he lived alone and depended on God alone for provision and protection. We can only imagine how much faith it took to withstand his enemies as they grew more hostile, and his situation grew more desperate.

Nonetheless, Elijah's years of preparation in prayer buoyed him for such a time as this.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What circumstances or relationships throughout your life have helped you grow in your faith?
2. What spiritual habits might you need to apply to help you grow in your relationship with God?

WEEK 7—DAY 3

READING: *1 Peter 2:9-10*

"Elijah" means "God is my God." In the ancient world, names held deep meaning and were often synonymous with a person's character and purpose. Without having to say a word, Elijah's name proclaimed his commitment to God alone. This was especially important because ancient Israel was steeped in idol worship.

Elijah was confident in his identity. He knew who he was and who he belonged to, so much so that he confronted the king and queen at the time and proclaimed the One True God wanted His people back. This required boldness, confidence, and a deep rootedness in identity.

Our identity is the core foundation of our lives. Identity determines beliefs, values, and purpose. The world tells us our identity is in appearance, acquisitions, accomplishments, gender, or addictions. This is identity theft. God alone gives us our identity.

As followers of Jesus—just like Elijah—we, too, have a powerful identity. 1 Peter tells us we are chosen, royalty, and a child of God (2:9-10). Ephesians reminds us that we are forgiven, holy, and blameless in God's sight (1:1-14). 1 John reminds us that we are beloved children of God (4:1-7).

Do our prayers reflect our identity?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Elijah could pray audacious prayers because he knew who he was and whose he was. Do you pray like the beloved child of God or like an orphan?
2. Read through 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Ephesians 1:1-14 and reflect on who you are in Christ. Which description encourages you to pray with confidence and why?

WEEK 7—DAY 4

READING: *1 Kings 18:20-46*

The people needed rain, and there was nothing wrong with praying for that. Water is necessary for life. Imagine the shock when Elijah prayed, and God rained down *fire*! God eventually brought rain, but what was with the fire?

Physical needs ultimately point toward spiritual needs. We may assume physical needs are most important, but God wants us to go deeper... our spiritual hunger and thirst. Jesus points this out to the woman at the well in John 4. He told her he wanted to give her "living water" versus water from the well. And in John 6 when people asked for bread, Jesus said they needed the Bread of Life (Himself).

It's not that we shouldn't pray for God's healing, provision, and safety. These prayers are worthy, and it's good to bring everything to God in prayer. In his book *When God Doesn't Answer Prayer*, Jerry Sittser reminds us that the supreme end to all prayers is to know God is enough. Whether we realize it or not, our deepest longings are for God Himself.

When God sent fire, the Israelites responded in worship and humility. They realized they needed to leave their idolatrous ways and turn back to God. Worship of the One True God in dependence and humility is what would ultimately bring true healing and lasting fruitfulness.

Then, the rain came.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can your needs encourage you to want more of Jesus?
2. Contrast the actions of the Baal prophets in 19:26-29 with Elijah's prayer in 19:36-38. How do the Baal prophets show us how not to pray?
3. Use Elijah's prayer principles of wanting to glorify God, affirm his faith, as well as draw others to faith, to frame your prayer requests.

WEEK 7—DAY 5

READING: *1 Kings 19:1-18*

God responded dramatically and decisively to Elijah's prayer on Mount Carmel, but Elijah struggled with how it all went down. Elijah ran for his life and into deep depression. In Elijah's mind, the king and queen were just too powerful, and the Israelites didn't want to change their idolatrous ways. He ran off to Mount Horeb and into a cave.

This is where we see Elijah is just the same as us. Elijah went through so much hardship just to get to Mount Carmel, yet nothing appeared to change. His struggle to speak for God and live for truth didn't seem to make much of a difference. He was still from the margins, still disregarded by those in power. He did everything God told him to do, but it didn't turn out like Elijah thought it should. Sound familiar? As a result, discouragement and self-pity set in.

Although God compassionately looked after Elijah's physical and spiritual needs, God didn't defend Himself. God simply told Elijah that He wasn't done with him yet. Maybe the fire and rain hadn't made any immediate difference, but God had a different perspective—an eternal one.

God also had other, less dramatic, obedience assignments to answer Elijah's prayers. These assignments kept the ball rolling, like anointing two kings that eventually slowed the idolatry in Israel and led to the queen's death. God wanted Elijah to mentor Elisha, who continued to inspire the people to pursue God long after Elijah was gone. These answers to prayer weren't as flashy as Mount Carmel, but were *just as important* (if not more) for God's redemptive purposes to move forward.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does our limited perspective contribute to our lack of faith in seeing answers to our prayers?
2. Can you think of any examples in your life where your expectations of what you think God should have done hijacked your faith?

MINI-CHURCH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WEEK 1

READING: *Matthew 6:5-6*

1. Did you grow up in an openly religious home? Was it a positive or negative? Why?
2. How did religious leaders in Jesus's day corrupt the discipline of prayer?
3. How would you describe hypocrisy?
4. The focus of verse six is not location, but attitude. Jesus says to go to the most secluded place so that you will not be distracted or tempted to show off. How could you put this into practice? Where would you go?
5. Does Matthew 6:6 rule out corporate prayer or public prayer in the life of a Christian? After discussion, see Acts 12:5-7 and Matthew 18:18-19.
6. What challenged or encouraged you most from the sermon? What questions do you have?

WEEK 2

READING: *Matthew 6:7-8*

1. Were you taught any prayers as a child? If so, what do you recall?
2. How would you describe "empty phrases?" (Verse 7)
3. Why would empty phrases in prayer dishonor God?
4. Is God against sincere repetition? See Luke 11:5-8 and Luke 18:1.
5. Why pray if God already knows our needs?
6. What challenged or encouraged you most from the sermon? What questions do you have?

WEEK 3

READING: *Matthew 6:9*

1. How does your relationship with your earthly father influence your relationship with your heavenly Father?
 2. What is significant about Jesus using "our" Father as opposed to "my" Father?
 3. If we pray as God's children, what makes us a "child of God"? (John 3:16, Romans 8:13-16)
 4. Why is it important that our Father resides in heaven? How does this encourage you?
 5. What does "hallowed be thy name" communicate about "our Father"?
 6. What challenged or encouraged you most from the sermon? What questions do you have?
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WEEK 4

READING: *Matthew 6:10*

1. How would you describe God's Kingdom?
2. What characteristics of God's Kingdom do you want to see happen on earth and in your life?
3. Elsewhere in Matthew 6, Jesus says to seek God's Kingdom as number one priority. What does this look like day to day?
4. Discuss the following quote by Amy Carmichael, a 20th-century missionary in India: "And shall I pray to change thy will, my Father until it accords to mine? Rather I pray to blend my human will with Thine." In what ways is God's will better than our will?
5. What does God's sovereignty mean to you?
6. What challenged or encouraged you most from the sermon? What questions do you have?

WEEK 5

READING: *Matthew 6:11*

1. How has God recently provided for you?
 2. Why ask God everyday for all that we need?
 3. How does asking God for our daily bread influence our humility, gratitude, and faith?
 4. How do God's promises in Psalm 23:1 and Luke 11:11-13 give you confidence to pray for what you need?
 5. Jesus says he is "the Bread of Life" in John 6:35. What idea do you think Jesus tries to communicate considering we pray for "our daily bread"?
 6. What challenged or encouraged you most from the sermon? What questions do you have?
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WEEK 6

READING: *Matthew 6:12*

1. Why is it difficult to ask for forgiveness?
2. Why is it difficult to forgive?
3. Why is it important to ask God for forgiveness on a regular basis? (1 John 1:9, Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 59:2)
4. Do we forgive others so that God will forgive us or does God forgive us so that we can forgive others?
5. Does forgiveness excuse the offense?
6. What challenged or encouraged you most from the sermon? What questions do you have?

WEEK 7

READING: *Matthew 6:13*

1. Can you share a time you experienced God's protection?
 2. God does not tempt us, but he tests us (James 1:2-4). We can pray that God leads us away from situations where we could sin. What does this request imply about the struggles we face as believers?
 3. Why do we so often give in to temptation? How can 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Hebrews 4:15 encourage us?
 4. Does verse 13 mean that God should not let anything bad happen to us? What does Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:38 say about the things God allows to happen to us?
 5. "Lead us not into temptation" indicates failures we battle within ourselves. "Deliver us from evil" points to the enemies we face outside of ourselves. Together, they are spiritual battles all believers must confront. What spiritual disciplines keep us strong as we daily seek victory in those battles? (See Hebrews 10:25 and Ephesians 6:10-20 if you have time).
 6. What challenged or encouraged you most from the sermon? What questions do you have?
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"We cannot pray and remain the same."

- Ruth Bell Graham

PRAYER TRANSFORMS US.

We turn to prayer for many reasons. We pray to express thanksgiving and present requests to God, seek comfort, or intercede for a friend in need. Sometimes prayer is our first response. Other times, it's our last resort. But what if our prayer life grew deeper than a checklist item before dinner? Or a rapid-fire request when something goes wrong? What if our prayer life ultimately led to a deeper *relationship with God*?

Walk with us through the prayer lives of Jesus, Hannah, Paul, Elijah, the Disciples, and learn how to pray for the disillusioned. As you read, may these examples become models for your own prayer life. Because more than requests, more than repeated words, more than a structure that begins with "Dear God" and ends with "Amen," the purpose of prayer is relationship with God.



ALLIANCE CHURCH
