



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

**Year Four
Third Quarter – Part I
Prayer**

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Second Quarter – Prayer

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Lesson One: The First Thing About Prayer (The Audience is King)

Primary Verses: “For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: though brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness. Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers. Psalm 74:12-15 (KJV)

Teaching Text: Psalm 74

Supporting Texts: Psalm 25

When most people communicate, they are focused on how to get their audience to respond to their requests and/or needs. While it may not be stated directly, the general assumption behind such a communicator is abundantly clear. In essence, the speaker says, “*I’m important enough and my desire is urgent enough to warrant a response from you, namely the response I’m specifically asking you for.*” While the skilled communicator is savvy enough to avoid offending their audience with self-centered language, they are generally no less self-interested than advertisers selling a product.

If there is a form of communication where the speaker must esteem the audience’s desires as superior to his/her own, it is prayer. In prayer, the Audience is omniscient so the only room for dishonesty is self-deceit. In prayer, the Audience is omnipotent, so the one who prays is not imposing his/her own will but seeking the permission of the One being addressed. In prayer, you can offer your Audience nothing that isn’t already His by rights of creation. As Arthur Pink puts it in his classic, “The Attributes of God:”

“During eternity past, God was alone: self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied; in need of nothing. Had a universe, had angels, had human beings been necessary to Him in any way, they also had been called into existence from all eternity. The creating of them when He did, added nothing to God essentially. He changes not (Mal. 3:6), therefore His essential glory can be neither augmented nor diminished.”

In prayer, our Audience is King because God is the audience. Therefore, prayer is not about the one praying and not even the thing(s) prayed for. Prayer is first and foremost about God.

Questions to Consider: Is the author of the Psalm being disrespectful in his opening question in verse 1? If it’s not disrespect, how do we explain the tone of verses 1-3? How does a good perspective on these verses aid our understanding of prayer? The author’s anguish is clear, but how does he portray it? Is the focus on his own trouble or on something else? How does the use of pronouns in this Psalm demonstrate the priorities of the author? How do passages such as Exodus 32:7-14 and Acts 9:1-5 help inform us of the psalmist’s approach to calamity and how God views the suffering of His people?

This Week’s “I Will” Challenge: Take time during class today to pray for the hearts and minds of our members in regards to worship. Let us pray against the cultural slide to a preference-driven church and pray for a collective move of TNMBC members and attendees toward God-centered, biblically informed worship.

Lesson Two: Prayer CAN Be Taught!

Primary Verses: “For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” Luke 11:10-13 (ESV)

Teaching Text: Matthew 6:5-14

Supporting Texts: Luke 11:1-13, Luke 18:1-8

We have come to embrace many “truisms” in Christianity - there are some things that we simply accept as basic fact. One of the most common one in relation to prayer is, “prayer is as natural to the Christian as breathing.” The statement itself is a helpful reminder that demonstrates the absolute necessity of prayer in the Christian life. If any human fails to take in oxygen through breathing (naturally or artificially), he/she dies. So it is in the Christian life. A Christian life without prayer is neither “Christian” nor “life,” but self-centered and death. For this reason, we accept this particular truism and even celebrate it. However...

If we are not careful, we can actually harm ourselves with a false analogy using the very same phrase. The wrongly-reasoned train of thought is: If prayer is like breathing, well, I never “learned” to breathe; it’s automatic... so how can someone teach me to pray? Isn’t that making prayer artificial? Doesn’t that put someone else between me and my heavenly Father? After all, I want my prayers to be natural! This kind of reasoning fails in at least two ways.

First and foremost, it denies the authority of Holy Scripture where we learn of the disciples’ request to be taught how to pray - and Jesus teaches them (Luke 11:1-2)! Secondly, it fails to account for the fact that many things we were taught to do are now “second-nature” or “natural” to us: brushing teeth, riding a bike, tying shoe laces, etc. No one was born able to do any of these. But over time, we barely bat an eye before the task is completed... as naturally as breathing. The believer who has been taught to pray and practices prayer until he/she prays like this is truly blessed!

Questions to Consider: How are Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 6:5-8 related to identifying the audience in prayer? Why does Jesus give those instructions? How many requests are made in “the Model Prayer?” Which requests are we able to attain on our own strength? How would you address friends/family who say they don’t need God for “daily bread,” etc.? What is the posture of one making requests and how does that relate to one of the purposes of prayer?

This Week’s “I Will” Challenge: If each of us addresses God as “Our Father,” then we are necessarily brothers and sisters! Let us pray for greater love within the family of God here at our church. Also, please pray corporately for the growth and expansion of small group ministries. Ask God to give TNMBC leaders the wisdom necessary to help improve/promote healthy retention of new members and encourage their growth in Christ.

Lesson Three: Daniel's School of Prayer

Primary Verses: "O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You. O Lord to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him." Daniel 9:7-9 (NKJV)

Teaching Text: Daniel 9:1-19

Supporting Texts: Luke 18:9-14

If there is any time that we should be talking about sin, it's in the context of prayer. The entire Christian enterprise really comes down to Christ's intercession to God on our behalf; not only as our Eternal High Priest in the heavens, but as the Sacrificial Lamb of God on the Cross. Since it is ultimately Christ's work on the Cross that opens up unhindered access to God in prayer, we must examine the role of sin and especially the confession of sin in prayer.

Despite excellent examples of confession of sin in prayer, this aspect is very unpopular, much avoided, and rarely discussed. Psalm 51 and Nehemiah 9 give us great models and instruction on the confession of sin. To be clear, confession is not merely admittance of sin, but the sincere agreement with God that sin is what God says it is, rather than some means of legitimate pleasure.

Some have ventured to argue that because Christ has come, there ought to be less emphasis on sin since Jesus has handled the problem for us. To give emphasis to the confession of sin gives the impression that God is angry with people, they say. But consider these words from Trevin Wax, Managing Editor of the Gospel Project:

"Today, however, the more pressing problem is not the idea of a God who is perpetually angry, but a shriveled god who is shallow and nice. If we don't see God taking sin seriously, we won't take it seriously either. And once we stop taking sin seriously, repentance loses its power. No surprise, then, that confession falls away, and the one thing for which all Christians should be known – repentant faith – is something we no longer express together in public."

Questions to Consider: Carefully examine Daniel 9:2-3. How is the book of Jeremiah connected to the prayer of Daniel? What does this communicate about the role of scripture in our prayers today? Note the use of the words "we" and "us." Is this use surprising to you in light of Daniel 1:1-6? What role does Daniel play in destruction of Jerusalem and God's judgement against Judah? How does his prayer instruct us on historical sins that affect us today? Or should it?

This Week's "I Will" Challenge: Chapter four of Thom Rainer's "I Will" deals with service. In the spirit of confession, take time today in class to read Philippians 2:1-11. Make prayers of confession for individual and collective failures to serve as Jesus served. But also give thanks that, because of Jesus' service on the Cross, all believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve sacrificially!

Lesson Four: Habakkuk's School of Prayer

Primary Verses: "I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart and watch to see what He will say to me and what I will answer when I am corrected. Then the LORD answered me and said: 'Write the vision and make it plain on tablets that he may run who reads it... behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.'" Habakkuk 2:1-4 (NKJV)

Teaching Text: Habakkuk 1-2

Supporting Texts: Habakkuk 3

In last week's lesson, we visited with Daniel as he pleaded with the Lord to accomplish His will. Daniel's prayer, while openly confessing his sin as well as the sin of the people, was also an urgent, heartfelt plea for God to fulfill the prophecy he had given to Jeremiah concerning the end of the Babylonian captivity. This week, we travel back in time a bit further to the days of the prophet Habakkuk who, through prayer, struggled mightily with God over His decision to chastise His rebellious people with an even more wicked people (Habakkuk 1:13) – Babylon - the "Evil Empire" of its day.

The sovereignty of God has been a head-scratching topic as long as humans have been around to observe and ponder upon it. Whether it was Job trying to figure out his miserable circumstances, Abraham's quest to understand why Isaac and not Ishmael, or Moses' struggle to accept his own calling. All saints, in all their varied trials, have only one sure fire way to handle all of life's variables - faith. Ultimately, it is our trust in God that carries us from day to day.

For having such a *short* book, Habakkuk's Holy-Spirit inspired words, "The just [righteous] shall live by faith" have very *long* legs. In the context of prayer, we recognize that without faith, there's never a reason to bow our heads or knees in prayer. Hebrews 11 is one of the most famous chapters (the Faith Hall of Fame) which argues that the entire Christian life is lived "by faith." One might even argue that the entire book of Romans itself is written as a postscript to explain the central truth that the Lord revealed to Habakkuk, "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17).

Questions to Consider: Read Romans 11:33-36. What does it mean for God's ways to be "unsearchable" or "past finding out?" How is this related to the need for faith? How would you describe or explain the link and relationship between one's prayer life and their faith in God? How often have you faced circumstances, like Habakkuk's, where you had/have questioned God's reasons/intentions for doing a thing or orchestrating a certain set of circumstances? When you disagree or don't like what God has done/allowed in your life, does it encourage you to or hinder you from prayer?

This Week's "I Will" Challenge: The topic of faith is especially appropriate for this particular chapter of "I Will." The challenge to "Go" is a call to trust that God is with us as we faithfully share the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). For many believers, sharing the message of the cross and the necessity of repentance and faith is a very daunting task. Take time to pray as a class that the Lord would give joy and boldness to "Go."

Selfless Prayer

“The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed” (v. 10b).

- [1 Samuel 2:1–11](#)

Abraham’s intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah is just one of many Old Testament passages that emphasize the importance of our prayers in bringing to pass the sovereign will of God. The Old Testament actually has a lot to say about prayer, but one thing we might miss is its emphasis on the need for individual prayers to be concerned for the covenant community.

[First Samuel 1:1–2:12](#) tells the story of Hannah in what is one of the most moving sections in Scripture. We know the story well. Hannah was a godly woman married to Elkanah the Ephraimite. For several years of her marriage she was unable to conceive any children. Each year she would go up to Shiloh with her family, and on one of those occasions, Hannah prayed fervently for a son and pledged to dedicate him to the Lord should she bear one. God had mercy on her and gave her the child she requested (1:1–20).

Today’s passage records the prayer Hannah offered in gratitude for the Lord’s answer to her. Some scholars believe there may have been a prayer that was part of the liturgy of the tabernacle that Hannah used as a framework for her own prayer. Whether or not that was the case, it is incredible that this prayer is focused not only on God’s goodness in the specific instance of giving Samuel to her but also looks to the mercies of the Lord on the entire nation of Israel. The prayer celebrates the sovereignty of our Creator in making Hannah’s barren womb fruitful (2:5b), and it looks for God to give strength to the king who is not yet on the throne of the nation (v. 10b). Hannah saw in the answer to her prayer a sign of the Lord’s grace on the entire community and thanked Him accordingly.

We should have a similar focus in our prayers. It is very easy to get so focused on our needs that we ignore the needs of the church. When God blesses us, it is appropriate to thank Him and to look for how that blessing might be shared with the Lord’s people as well. Hannah asked for Samuel with an eye toward giving him over to serve God and prepare the way for Israel’s king (see also 1 Sam. 9; 16), and we too should intercede with an eye as to how the answer might be used to extend His kingdom. Our prayer is truly to be selfless — prayer that takes into account the needs of God’s people.

Coram Deo

As you pray for specific things, do you take into account how the answers may impact the kingdom? Though in some cases it will be easier to do so than in others, all of us should endeavor to pray for things that can help the ministry of the church. Are you praying for a spouse? Pray for a godly spouse who can bless the church. Are you praying for a raise? Pray for a raise that will enable you to give abundantly to kingdom outreach.

Passages for Further Study

[Numbers 11:1–3](#)

[Psalm 28:8–9](#)

[Amos 7:1–9](#)

[Luke 2:36–38](#)

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