



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

Pray! How often do we hear this request from those who have a need or those facing a major decision? Many times it is the last resort in one's own mind; however, this should be our first resort. I read and have used this statement, "It is not the unanswered prayers that we should get too concerned about, but the unoffered prayer." There is a lot of truth in that statement. Through this study we hope to encourage and challenge you in the discipline of prayer as a follower of Christ for every aspect of life. Prayer should be a major focus in our walk with the Lord as it is the means to communicate with Him. I trust you will apply these principles of prayer in your life.

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7 day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that each teacher may have their own method for preparing to teach the lesson and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes him or her most effective in presenting God's Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7 day approach for each one's own personal study and encouragement.

In closing, let me give you a few things to pray for: your growth as a follower of Christ, your family, your church, your pastor, the church staff, your Bible Study teacher, and help to be aware of opportunities the Lord gives you each day to share your faith. Remember anytime is a good time to Pray! [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)

-Blessings
Pastor Don



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your [Connect Class](#) on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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March 5, 2017



Walking with God in Prayer

Psalm 86:1-17

Focal Verse:

"Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth;
unite my heart to fear Your name."

Psalm 86:11

Introduce

Perhaps many of us have played or may even currently play some type of amateur sport. Regardless of our level of natural ability or talent, every one of us at some point needed instruction and guidance from a coach who had mastered the fundamentals of the game and could impart these acquired skills to others. As a young boy, I had the privilege of playing Little League baseball for one summer while in elementary school. The coach would teach everything from the proper stance while batting to the proper way to position yourself in the outfield to catch



a fly ball. From the dugout, the coach would bark instructions for those who lose focus, whether at the plate or in the field, by exclaiming, “Keep your eye on the ball!” At other times, he may guide his player’s steps by positioning them in the field and encouraging them to get in front of the ball that may be hit in their direction so they don’t make a careless error by booting it. Because he has nine players on the diamond and a plethora on the bench, the coach is often unable to provide one-on-one instruction, but he invites the team to gather together and “take a knee.” The purpose for gathering and squatting on one knee is to listen to instruction that will not only make them better individual players, but also a better team.

Through prayer, God has figuratively invited us to gather and take a knee so that He can impart wisdom and instruction that will make us better

Introduce

members of His team—the church. Like a coach, God guides us in prayer so that we don't falter in sin and make mistakes. In addition, He helps us to maintain focus on His will so that we can have an abundant life ([John 10:10](#)). For this reason, in his prayer in [Psalm 86](#), David asks, "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name." Unlike a human coach, however, God provides expert personal attention to each of us who has a relationship with Him; God spends time with us individually not because he doesn't know our needs, but because He wants to communicate and have a personal relationship with us whereby we depend upon Him for salvation, provision, and wisdom, knowing that He alone can meet our needs and sustain us. So as we study prayer throughout this month, let's spend time on our knees seeking the face of the Lord and the instruction He wishes to impart to us.

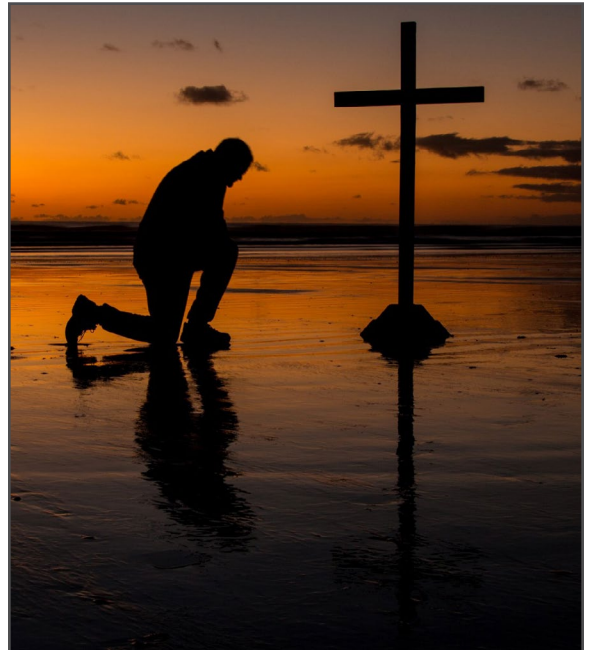
Key Question

According to [Psalm 86](#), what are some of the reasons we ought to spend time in prayer?

Psalm 86:1-7

ACKNOWLEDGE THE NEED FOR SALVATION:

In order to walk with God in prayer, we must first have a relationship with Him and acknowledge Him as the sole source of our salvation. David begins this psalm with a solemn request for the Lord to **bow down** His **ear** and **hear** his prayer. He, however, doesn't demand that God **hear** his prayer in a crass, egotistical way, but rather asks God even in His sovereignty to take time to listen to the prayer of His wayward servant who needs **mercy**. The psalms which request help or deliverance by God frequently contain a plea for God to **hear** and respond to the prayer (Psalm 40:1; 71:2; 88:2). A request that God **hear** the prayer doesn't mean that the one who makes the petition lacks faith in God's ability to answer or that somehow God only listens to us when we request it, but it demonstrates a dependence upon God to meet the need ([Phil 4:6](#)). For example, the author of [Psalm 71:2](#) cries out, "Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; **Incline** Your ear to me, and save me." The word translated **incline** is the same one translated **bow down** in [86:1](#); thus, David asks the Lord to have favor upon him and meet his need, particularly for salvation and spiritual restoration.



Why should we make our needs known to God?

Question
1

Next, David explains the reason why he desires God to listen and answer his prayer—because he is **poor and needy**. At first glance, we may wonder why a wealthy, powerful king like David would make the claim to be **poor and needy**, especially if we understand it in terms of physical wealth or prestige; however, in the context of this psalm it refers to his need for salvation and **mercy** because of his sinful spiritual condition. The word translated **poor** often carries with it a spiritual connotation of lacking morality or being sinful. Consequently, when paired with the word **needy** it signifies a poor spiritual condition—in other words being sinful whereby we are in the need of salvation beyond our own ability to attain it.

In-Depth Information



*The Hebrew dictionary by Gesenius suggests the word translated **poor** can mean “afflicted, wretched, poor, often with the added idea of piety.” Another psalm by David portrays the same meaning as [86:1](#) when he writes: “For You will save the **humble** people, but will bring down haughty looks” ([Psalm 18:27](#)). The word humble is the same word David uses in [Psalm 86:1](#) when he says He is **poor** and needy; consequently, God offers salvation to those who realize their need and ask for mercy and forgiveness.*

David recognizes that he needs salvation from the Lord not only in terms of the physical peril that he has faced in his life, but even more importantly from the spiritual peril. God has rescued David many times in his life when he was physically in danger, such as when facing the giant Goliath in battle or escaping the deranged King Saul who constantly tried to kill him. Spiritually, however, God has also rescued David from the sin of an adulterous affair, the deception of covering it up, and even plotting the death of Uriah by knowingly sending him to the front of the battle lines where he would surely be killed. For this reason, David pleads with God to **preserve his life** and ultimately to **save His servant**.

In what ways are we poor and needy like David?

Question
2

Even though David recognizes his need for salvation, he has assurance that God has already rescued him spiritually because he has a relationship with the Lord. Twice in this section David identifies himself as God's **servant who trusts in Him** ([vv. 2, 4](#)). He acknowledges that God has acted benevolently to him by being **good and ready to forgive** ([v. 5](#)). As a just and righteous God, He must punish evil, but He also extends mercy to those who ask for forgiveness. Therefore, David can only claim to be **holy** because God has been **merciful** and forgiven him of his transgressions. Consequently, he concludes this section with a confident assertion that **in the day of his trouble** God **will answer** when he calls **upon** Him ([v. 7](#)).

In-Depth Information



Although the Hebrew word for **good** can have various meanings, in this context it signifies a moral quality. In other words, God is righteous and holy.

Besides forgiveness of your sin, what other ways has God shown mercy to you?

Question
3

When we pray, we must always remember our dependence upon the Lord for the salvation that He offers through His Son. Even though, like David, we may already have a relationship with God based on His forgiveness and **mercy**, we must realize that growing in our salvation is an on-going process in which we should seek to become more like Christ each day. Although we cannot lose our salvation, we must constantly seek to remain connected to Christ through prayer so that we can remain **holy** as God's **servant** who pleases Him.

Why is it important to acknowledge our salvation and dependence upon God?

Question
4

Psalm 86:7-10

ACKNOWLEDGE THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD:

In order to walk with God in prayer, we need to acknowledge His

uniqueness and worship His majesty. After recognizing God as the source of salvation, David bursts into spontaneous praise in which he proclaims the uniqueness of God in all the universe. Therefore, he asserts that **among the gods there is none like you**. David isn't acknowledging the existence of other gods, but rather incorporates another way of stating that Yahweh is the one and only true and living God. In fact, he makes it clear in [verse 10](#) that no other gods exist when he announces that Yahweh **alone** is God. Conversely, these other so-called gods made from metal and stone are merely inanimate objects which cannot think, hear, or respond ([Hab 2:18](#)).

God alone can act and provide for His creation for His **works** are also unrivaled ([v. 8](#)). God in His greatness does **wondrous things** ([v. 10](#)) and performs incomprehensible acts of kindness toward His creation.



Psalm 8:1 "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens!"

Through what evidence do you witness God's greatness and uniqueness in the world today? How do you communicate it with God through prayer?

Question
5

As the Creator and the One who provides for us, God alone should be worshiped and glorified. Even if God never provided anything for us, He is still worthy of receiving worship from **all nations** simply out of respect for our Creator. Yet, God is not merely a calloused Creator who **made** us

Instruct

and then left us alone to fend for ourselves, but rather He is a Creator who loves us intimately and provides for our every need. Out of this vast universe which God has **made**, as individuals we are seemingly insignificant in the grand scheme of things; however, to God, who desires to have a relationship and communicate with us, each one of us has value and importance ([Psalm 8:3-6](#)). Therefore, our natural response in prayer should be like that of David who acknowledges that **all nations whom** God has made will **worship** and glorify His **name** ([v. 9](#)). Consequently, prayer should be another avenue through which we extend our worship of the Lord; often in prayer we tend to focus solely on our personal needs or on interceding on behalf of others so that we gloss over praise and worship. We may thank God for answering our prayers or say one line of something praiseworthy, but it's not the center of our prayers. When we pray, we need to spend time worshiping the Lord for who He is and what He has done.

What reasons do you have to worship and glorify God in your life?

Question
6

Psalm 86:11-14

ACKNOWLEDGE THE NEED FOR INSTRUCTION:

In order to walk with God in prayer and deal effectively with adversity in our lives, David acknowledges that he needs God to **teach** him His **truth** ([v. 11](#)). In [86:1-7](#), he prayed for preservation and salvation which brings about the transformation for which he now prays in [86:11](#). To walk with

the Lord, we must change our way of life and **walk** according to His **truth**—no easy and mindless task, but one that requires concentration and dedication. Through God’s help, we must rid ourselves of a lifestyle of habitual sin and seek to live within the boundaries that He has established for us. To walk by God’s boundaries, we must first know His **truth** and what it entails; God reveals His **truth** to us through prayer and Scripture.



In-Depth Information



*The word **teach** in Hebrew has a variety of meanings; according to Gesenius, its root means to show or indicate by pointing; thus, in this sense, **teach** means to reveal by pointing out the boundaries by which one should live or even pointing out things in one’s life that need correction. Literally, David asks God to show him the way or direct his paths in the way that he should go. In [Psalm 32:8](#), God reveals to David, “I will instruct you and **teach** you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.” In our lives, we need to ask God daily to show us the way that we ought to live and point out things in our lives which we need to change in order to live more like Jesus every day.*

We need God’s truth most in our lives when we face adversity so that we don’t compromise our values and stumble in our walk. During an

Instruct

unidentified external struggle in his life which prompted this prayer, David takes time to pray that God would **teach** him **truth**. He indicates that his enemies **have arisen against** him which led to a **violent mob** seeking his **life** (v. 14). He further reveals that these men have rejected God's truth and have **not set** Him **before them**. In perilous times such as these, we need God's guidance most in our lives so that we are able to demonstrate to others how God has transformed our walk. For example, the world teaches that we ought to retaliate through revenge or even preemptively striking before someone has a chance to do something to us. When we walk according to God's will, however, we will **praise God** in the midst of adversity and seek to **glorify** His **name** in how we respond to others with love and patience.

How can prayer help us respond to adverse situations or stress? In your own life, how have you seen God work during adversity or stress as you prayed to Him for guidance?

Question
7

Psalm 86:15-17

ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S PROVISION:

After praying to God for guidance, David acknowledges God's provision in His life and spends time praising His character. In contrast to the arrogant and **violent mob** which rose against David, God acts with **compassion**, patience, and **mercy** (v. 15). God extends compassion toward us just as a loving Father who loves His children unconditionally.

He takes care of our every need—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual; He meets our basic need for food, clothing, shelter, companionship, and a whole host of other items too numerous to list. God displays His compassion most poignantly through His **longsuffering**, or patience. God is patience with us when we make mistakes; He doesn't hold grudges or play favorites, but freely offers forgiveness to any who ask. He offers forgiveness through His Son to anyone willing to surrender to His will. Through His grace and **mercy** God removes the stain of our sin and grants us access to eternal life.

Through what difficult times has God demonstrate His compassion, patience, and mercy with you? How did God guide your prayers during this time?

Question
8

In addition, David prays for strength to face these tumultuous times in his life; instead of pleading with God to remove the difficulties in his life, David prays that God will see him through his problems and provide **strength** for him as a **sign** for those who **hate** him ([v. 17](#)). David desires that his enemies recognize God as the source of his provision and **comfort** as a testimony unto the Lord. Often when things go awry in our lives, we pray that God would remove the obstacles or difficulties rather than helping us to endure them. Although we shouldn't seek trouble in our lives, when it arises we need to use it as an opportunity to point others to God and help them realize that He is caring and **compassionate** and the source of our **strength**.

How can we use God's provision in our lives as a testimony to non-believers?

Question
9

When the Little League coach invites us to gather and take a knee, we should listen to the instruction that he gives. Unfortunately, many children daydream while the coach speaks; some may hear the instruction only to forget it moments later. Sometimes when we pray we fail to allow God to speak and instruct us because we are either preoccupied or prayer has become a meaningless ritual. Prayer, however, is a form of communication in which we should spend time talking with God, but we must also take the time to listen to God's directives for our lives.



If we are serious about maturing in Christ, we need to pray with purpose; prayer shouldn't be something that we rush through as if we are completing a checklist, but it requires commitment. When we pray to seek instruction from God, we should record it in a journal. Writing what God reveals to us helps us in two ways. First, it helps us to remember and chart our progress, setting tangible goals to assess how well we are doing in applying what God has taught us. Second, it keeps our prayers from becoming too general. For instance, look at the difference between praying: "God help me be good" and "God help me to show compassion to my friend / family member / co-worker by listening more to their needs." As we pray this week, let us seek instruction from the Lord and apply it in our lives in a tangible way. When we pray with purpose, God will point out areas in our lives which we need to improve and change so that we can walk according to His truth in all situations, having a more abundant and fruitful life filled with His joy.

Spend time in prayer praising God for your salvation. Like David, we are all “poor and needy” and constantly in the need of forgiveness; write down the areas which God reveals to you in which you need to seek forgiveness. (Be honest as only you will see this.)

Spend time in prayer worshiping God for who He is and what He’s done. As you pray, write down the traits of God’s character which He has revealed most to you this week (i.e. love, grace, mercy, compassion, provision, etc.) Also, record the things that God has done for you for which you should be thankful. Spend time in prayer praising and thanking Him for these things.

Incorporate

Spend time in prayer asking God to teach you. What areas did God reveal in which you need to the most instruction?

If you're undergoing a difficult time, ask God to give you strength and help you testify to non-believers about His provision. If all is well, think about when God has provided for you during difficult times and list the ways that you can use these times as a testimony for His glory.

Journal: Document God's Work

March 12, 2017



Worshiping God through Prayer

Psalm 66:1-20

Focal Verse:

"Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer,
Nor His mercy from me!"

Psalm 66:20

Introduce

Even with the establishment of the National Do Not Call List several years ago, most of us probably still receive an annoyingly high volume of calls from telemarketers. If we have the “privilege” of speaking with a human person rather than a computer or recording, as soon as we say “hello” we realize that the person on the other end has an agenda. The telemarketer



immediately begins reading a polished presentation which has been crafted by skillful orators touting the advantages of their product or service. As we listen, the person babbles for minutes at a time rarely even pausing for breath at punctuation marks so as not to give us the slightest opportunity to respond. Trying to speak over them doesn't even phase them and they continue their speech undaunted. If we are polite, we will listen and wait for the opportunity to say, “No thank you, I'm not interested”—if we can make it that far without pressing the off button and ending the call. Although we may say “no thank you,” the telemarketer will not take no for an answer and has been trained to respond with different tactics in trying to get you to purchase the product. Although receiving calls at inopportune times can be highly annoying, the most frustrating part is that the telemarketers do not listen and do not take the opportunity to get to know you; they come with an agenda regardless of our needs. Sometimes we may approach prayer like a telemarketer; we come to God with a list of needs and rarely spend time getting to know Him. As we

Introduce

rattle off our petitions, we fail to listen to God and sometimes we won't accept His no for an answer so we become bitter and frustrated. Yet, prayer signifies a relationship with our heavenly Father who created us and gave us life through His Son. Because He is our sovereign Creator, we need to not only spend time getting to know Him, but we also need to spend time worshiping and praising Him. Even though God desires to hear our needs and meet them, He also desires a personal relationship with us whereby we acknowledge His glory and majesty through worship. Consequently, much of our prayer should be centered on the worship of our Lord so that we can "sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious" ([Psalm 66:2](#)).

Key Question

How often do you spend worshiping God in your prayer?
On what do you spend most of your time praying?

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS GLORIOUS PROVISION:

The unnamed author of this psalm immediately commences with the worship of the Lord rather than a laundry list of needs and requests. The psalmist bids **all the earth to make a joyful shout** ([v. 1](#)); as God's people, we are to celebrate not only the victory He's given us in Christ Jesus, but also the sheer magnitude of His sovereignty and holiness displayed in the creative works of His hands. In [Psalm 145:3](#), David writes, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable." As our Creator, God alone is worthy of our praise; therefore, we **should sing out the honor of His name and make His praise glorious** ([v. 2](#)). Prayer should be a time to praise God and extol His virtuous character rather than a monotonous time in which we focus solely on our troubles. We should certainly pray to God during difficult times and express our needs to Him, but prayers always centered on this will cause us to become depressed and focused on our circumstances rather than rejoicing in the Lord and trusting in His provision.

In-Depth Information



Often in the Psalms, the King James Version translates **shout** as **noise**: "make a joyful **noise** unto God." Because of this translation, people often take it as a reference to someone who can't sing; thus, we are simply to try to praise God with our voices even if we can't carry a tune. However, this interpretation distorts the meaning of the Hebrew. In [Psalm 66:1](#),

In-Depth Information



the way the verb is constructed means “to shout in triumph” especially over one’s enemies. This meaning becomes clear in [Psalm 47:1](#) which proclaims, “Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! **Shout** to God with the voice of triumph!”

In your life, for what reasons do you have to “make a joyful shout to God?”

Question
1

In [verse 3](#), the psalmist praises God for His work of creation; he declares **how awesome are Your works**. Although works can mean the things which God has done for us—which it does later in [verse 5](#)—here it means the work of creation itself. David, in [Psalm 8:3](#), praises God:

“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have ordained.” When we take time to observe the grandeur and magnificence of the creation, we can’t help but worship the One who created it. Today, many people mistakenly worship the creation above the Creator as if it has some



[Men’s Ministry Trip](#) in 2016 to Lake Thomas Recreation Area in the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma.

mystical power, but we who have a relationship with the Lord recognize that the beauty of nature is only the beginning of the worship of the Lord because it serves to reveal His **awesome** power and glory.

In May of 2016, several men from church traveled to the Wichita Mountains in Oklahoma for a [Men's Ministry camping trip](#). Staying along the banks of Lake Elmer Thomas, we were able to witness one of the most spectacular sunsets that most of us had ever seen. Just as the sun began to set, storm clouds began to brew in the distance producing a dazzling display of cloud to ground lightning. As the sun made its way toward the Wichita Mountains on the horizon, the clouds began to drift and make their way over Mount Scott without obscuring the light totally. The waning sunlight lit the sky with brilliant shades of orange, red, and yellow as the focused beams of light reflected off the clouds with a crown-like radiance. The brilliant color of the sunset contrasted with the pale, hazy mountains in the distance as they reflected off the placid lake. As we saw the beauty that God had created and the power that He displayed in the coming storm, we reverently worshiped Him—the One who created all things and set the universe in motion. When we see such stunning images of beauty and complexity, it should trigger within us the desire to communicate and worship the God who created us. Therefore, as we pray, let us praise God for the **works** of His hands and His glory and majesty on display through the creation.

What in nature inspires you to offer praise to the Lord for His mighty and awesome works?

Question
2

Because creation reveals God's **awesome works**, the psalmist asserts that **all the earth** will **worship** Him and **sing praises** to His **name** ([v. 4](#)). For even His **enemies** have no response to the revelation of His power through nature and everyone will **submit** to His authority ([v. 3](#)). Even those who reject God and rebel against Him on earth must still submit to His might displayed in nature through natural phenomena like the weather, tsunamis, earthquakes, etc. Nothing that any man can do can stop the terrible force of a tornado; man is rendered impotent with his only option being to hide from the wrath of the storm in a shelter. In addition, the **greatness** of God's **power** becomes manifest both through His merciful rescue of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked to which the psalm turns in [v. 5](#).

Next, the author invites creation to **come and see the works of God**; in contrast to those **works** in [v. 3](#), the works here are those performed in direct assistance to the **sons of men** ([v. 5](#)). These are the works of deliverance or help offered unto people. In [verse 6](#), the psalmist recalls one such work in which God delivered His people through the **sea on dry land** and led them **through the river on foot**. Recalling history, we know that God parted the Red Sea after the people had left Egypt; they became trapped to



north by the Mediterranean Sea, to the east by the Red Sea, and to the south and west by desert and the pursuing Egyptian army. Moses, as directed by God, held his staff and God sent an east wind to block the sea so that the children of Israel passed on dry ground; however, when Pharaoh and his army attempted to cross, the waves crashed over them killing the entire army and destroying their chariots and weapons. Forty years later when God used Joshua to lead the people into the Promise Land, He performed the same feat on the Jordan River allowing Israel to once again cross on dry ground.

As we read the Bible, we can observe countless times when God performed mighty **works** on behalf of His people. God in His sovereignty rules by His **power** determining the course of the **nations** to execute His divine plan. Through His divine plan, God observes the nations and punishes the **rebellious** ([v. 7](#)), but for His people God acts benevolently and compassionately to provide for their needs through His **works**. Just as God worked in antiquity to provide for His people during perilous times, He still works today in such miraculous ways toward us. Therefore, when we pray, we must remember to praise God not only for what He has done in our lives, but also for what He has done collectively for His people.

For what works in your life and what works collectively in the life of His people can you praise God?

Question
3

Psalm 66:8-12

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS PROTECTION:

After the invitation to witness the **works of God**, the prayer turns to collective praise whereby the psalmist instructs the people to **ble**s**s God** and **make the voice of His praise heard** (v. 8). The children of Israel had witnessed God’s miraculous intervention at the Red Sea through which He kept **their soul among the living** (v. 9)—in other words, God protected His people physically from suffering grave and mortal harm. Although God doesn’t promise that physical harm will not come to His people, for numerous of His servants have been killed for His name ([John 16:2-4](#)), each one of us can probably think of an instance where God has



brought us through physical trials by sparing our lives—whether a life-threatening disease, car accident, or significant work injury. Even more specifically, God **keeps our soul among the living**

that He offers through His Son! God will not allow us to shrink back in fear, but He plants our feet firmly on the ground through the storms of life by being our rock and shield who will protect us (v. 9); therefore, let us praise God for being our Protector.

In your life, how has God been your Protector?
How often do you thank Him for being your Protector?

Question
4

If God allows us to experience physical turmoil in our lives, like Job, it doesn't mean that He loves us any less, but rather He loves us even more because He brings us through this tribulation as a way to produce maturity and draw us closer to Him. Even though God never tempts us to do evil ([James 1:13-14](#)), He does test our commitment to Him by allowing us to encounter various trials. Throughout their wilderness journey, God tested the children of Israel through a series of events, but He always provided for them. He wanted Israel to learn to trust Him and seek His guidance in complete surrender. In [verses 11-12](#), the author uses several metaphors to describe the **affliction** that they endured and to encapsulate how the people felt: 1) they felt trapped (i.e. like a **net**), they felt oppressed (i.e. **affliction on their backs**), they felt threatened (i.e. **men riding over their heads**), and they felt overwhelmed (as if deluged by **fire** and **water**). Nonetheless, God still provided for them by bringing them **out to rich fulfillment** ([v. 12](#)). Perseverance through trials produces character; God doesn't abandon us during times of testing, but rather works to purify us **as silver is refined** ([v. 10](#)). Even though we may face trials of various kinds, God uses them for our benefit to help us become more mature and more reliant upon Him; therefore, when we are tested and endure trials, we still need to pray and praise God for His protection and deliverance.

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, how would you describe your feelings during times of testing?
How do times of testing affect your prayer life?
In what way should you pray during these times?

Question
5

Psalm 66:13-17

PRAISE GOD THROUGH PROCLAMATION:

Our natural response after enduring a trial should be praise directed toward the One who delivered us. Since we no longer participate in



sacrifices because we have the once-for-all sacrifice in Christ Jesus, we should still offer **sacrifices** of praise from our lips in our prayers. After enduring hardships in the wilderness, the children of Israel offered various kinds of **offerings** in accordance with the vows that they had made to honor the Lord ([v. 13](#)).

Furthermore, the **burnt offerings** of **bulls** and **goats** ([v. 15](#)) were accompanied by a proclamation of praise and testimony about God's deliverance. The psalmist invites the community **to come and hear** for he **will**

declare what the Lord has done for him ([v. 16](#)). The message is directed toward God because He **cried out with** his **mouth** and proclaimed the praises **with** his **tongue** ([v. 17](#)). In our prayers, we must remain conscious of the opportunity to praise our God; yet, the praise in our prayers must be on our lips as we testify to others about God's goodness and provision. We must proclaim what God has done for us in times of private communion with Him, but we should also share in public testimony so that all may hear who God is and what He has done for us.

In what way should your prayer life enhance your ability to testify about God and share the gospel?

Question
6

PRAISE GOD WITH THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:

Although we will talk in much more detail about this concept in two weeks when we study “The Wall that Hinders Prayer,” the author of [Psalm 66](#) notes that we must praise God through prayer with the right perspective. Unconfessed, habitual sin hinders our prayers. The psalmist admits that God **will not hear** our prayers **if** we have **iniquity in our heart** ([v. 18](#)). When we enter in a time of prayer, we need to do so reverently by confessing our sin so that we may approach the throne through the grace of Christ in holiness. Yet, the psalmist doesn’t dwell on this thought much because he knows he’s in right standing with God who has **heard** his praise and **attended**, or listened to, his **prayer** ([v. 19](#)). When we pray with sincerity in holiness God hears our prayers and answers them according to His will. Therefore, as we pray, let us pray in humility with sincere and contrite hearts praising God and being mindful that He will meet our needs according to His good purposes; therefore, we can pray with boldness and confidence ([Heb 4:16](#)).

Why does God not hear our prayers if we harbor sin in our heart?

Question
7

How does it make you feel when you encounter someone who either asks you for something every time he sees you or a person who has a long list of ailments and complaints ready for the moment you begin a conversation? Most of us would have two reactions: 1) we would do everything within our power to avoid that person or 2) we would roll our eyes, sigh, and then reluctantly listen trying to look for a way to escape the entire time. Although God is never frustrated when we pray to Him and He never tries to avoid us, many times we use prayer as a platform for our needs rather than a medium for praising God.



God wants us to have a balanced prayer life in which we praise Him, seek His guidance, ask for forgiveness when needed, make requests for our needs, and intercede on behalf of others. Balanced prayer begins when we focus our worship on the Lord and remember all the ways He has acted benevolently and provided for us. As we pray, we need to think of specific instances in which God has provided or protected us so that we can honor Him with the praise and thanksgiving that He deserves. When we write thank-you letters, do we write with specifics in mind or do we send an impersonal general

letter? We write with specifics so that the person will know how much we appreciate what he or she has done for us. Why should we spend only a short amount of time in prayer with a general sentence thanking God for all His blessings without showing gratitude for the specific ways in which He has worked in our lives? Consequently, we often become frustrated in our prayers when they become too general and routine and we feel like we don't know for what we should pray; however, if we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, He will show us by reminding us how God has worked in our lives ([Rom 8:26](#)). Above all, spend time in prayer this week thinking of specific ways you can praise God for what He has accomplished through your life!

Incorporate

Take time to examine the attitude with which you enter prayer. Do you have any unconfessed sins? Have you come merely with an agenda of needs and not items of praise? Ask God to reveal your attitude to you. Jot down how God is speaking to you about your attitude.

This week we examined how we should praise God through prayer. Spend time praising and thanking God for His provision. As instances come to mind, write them here.

Spend time praising and thanking God for His protection. Describe some of the ways that God has protected you—either physically or spiritually—over the course of your life. Record them here.

Finally, how often do you verbally share testimonies of God’s provision, protection, grace, and mercy in your life with others? Pray and ask God to direct you to someone with whom you can share a testimony from a time about which you have written above in the previous two questions. Then put action to your prayer and make a point to share with the people you identify here on these lines.

March 19, 2017



Discerning the Will of God through Prayer

Psalm 143:1-12

Focal Verse:

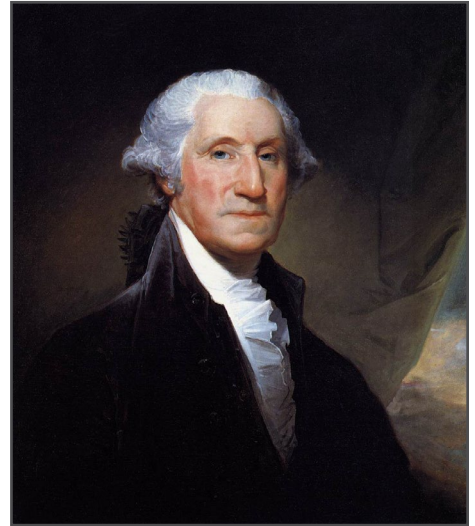
"Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness."

Psalm 143:10

Introduce

The world has an erroneous idea about what makes a person great; from the world's perspective, success comes from natural ability, hard work, intelligence, prestige, wealth, and quite often from mere luck. However, true greatness comes from a relationship with God through prayer—which the world wrongly and ironically calls a crutch displaying weakness.

Perhaps the most well-known founding father is our first president, George Washington. If we were to ask secular historians or even ordinary citizens to describe him, they would probably use adjectives like: courageous for crossing the frozen Delaware River in pursuit of the British army, tenacious for battling a superior and better-equipped army, and intelligent for leading a burgeoning country to victory,



national unity, and stability. But would anyone describe him as prayerful? Indeed, George Washington was a prayerful man even in his youth which allowed him to become a successful leader and politician. In 1752 at twenty years of age, he kept a prayer journal of both his morning and evening prayers. Printed by William J. Johnson, Washington prays the following in one entry: "Take care, I pray thee of my affairs and more and more direct me in thy truth, defend me from my enemies, especially my spiritual ones. Suffer me not to be drawn from thee, by the blandishments of the world, carnal desires, the cunning of the devil, or deceitfulness of sin. Work in me thy good will and pleasure, and discharge my mind from all things that

Introduce

are displeasing to thee, of ill will and discontent, wrath and bitterness, pride and vain conceit of myself, and render me charitable, pure, holy, patient, and heavenly minded.”

Although Washington’s words aren’t inspired in the same way as Scripture, they still reflect many of the same principles David discusses in [Psalm 143](#) in his prayer to God. Like David, Washington seeks to discern God’s truth and follow His will, to have victory over his foes, to learn how to live within God’s boundaries, to receive mercy and forgiveness when he transgresses those boundaries, and to have a humble and pure attitude. Washington, therefore, was not a great leader by his own power, but because he sought guidance from the Lord. When we humbly and faithfully pray for God to reveal His will to us, all other things will fall into place and we will live a transformed life that honors God and pleases Him.

Key Question

Why is it important to pray for discernment concerning God’s will?

In Reference



Portions of Washington’s prayer journal can be found in [George Washington: The Christian, by William J. Johnson](#), Christian Liberty Press, pages 23-35.

Psalm 143:1-4

REQUEST GOD'S MERCY:

Just as in [Psalm 86:1](#) which we studied two weeks ago, David begins by asking the **Lord** to **hear** his **prayer**. Often in the psalms, which are like modern-day poems, the author repeats an idea for emphasis; so David, as another way of asking God to **hear** his **prayer** in the second line of the psalm, begs Him to **give ear**, or listen, to his **supplications** ([v. 1](#)). Not only does David ask God to listen, but He also requests that He **answer** his prayer. David has a strong conviction that the Lord will **answer** based on two traits of His character: His **faithfulness** and His **righteousness**. David doesn't dictate or demand that God respond to his need in a particular way, but rather he recognizes that the Lord will keep and fulfill His word because He has always been faithful in the past. Moreover, God will respond in His **righteousness**—that is His goodness and holiness— which means that David will be blessed and benefit if he follows the Lord's prescription.

Sometimes we may pray with a preconceived outcome in mind; we have a course of action planned for our lives and we merely pray to God for a blessing—even tacking “in Your will” on the end as a courtesy. We spend time investing in prayer trying to get God to respond in a certain way as



Frustration and despair in prayer comes when we elevate our desires over God's will in our lives.

if we could manipulate His actions. Then, when God doesn't answer the prayer in a way in which we want, we become discouraged or even bitter. In truth, we haven't sought God's will, but tried to get His stamp of approval for what we seek to do. Even though we may ask God to hear and respond to our prayers, we must be open to the way He may answer it according to His **faithfulness** and **righteousness**.

At what times in your life have you prayed to God with a preconceived plan without truly listening to His response and seeking His will?

Question
1

After he asks God to listen to his prayer, he requests mercy from the Lord by pleading with Him **not** to **enter judgment** against His **servant** ([v. 2](#)). David realizes that everyone, including a man after God's own heart like he, should receive judgment because **no one living is righteous**. In [Psalm 14:3](#), David further explains, "They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is not one who does good, no not one." In contrast to God's righteousness as seen in [verse 1](#), we all have sinned and deserve the penalty of death, but God in His infinite mercy removes His wrath and **judgment** against those who confess their sin and have a relationship through His Son. We ought to approach prayer with our heavenly Father reverently and humbly. In order to be in a right spirit for prayer, therefore, we must confess our sin as his **servant** and recognize our dependence upon Him for grace and mercy just as David does here. When David wrote this psalm as a prayer, he was going through a difficult

time in his life. David laments that the **enemy** has pursued him and **crushed his life to the ground** so that he feels like he **dwells in darkness** ([v. 3](#)). In more modern terms, David would likely say that he has come to a “dark place” in his life—one in which he feels separated from God and overcome with grief and despair. Indeed, in [verse 4](#), he admits that his **spirit** feels **overwhelmed** and his **heart distressed**. Every one of us has encountered trials and grief in our lives whether from persecution for standing for what is right, personal issues with our health, the death of a loved one, financial uncertainty, or a rocky relationship with family or friends. During these times of tribulations, we especially need to turn to God to seek His will—lest we become despondent, **overwhelmed**, and dysfunctional. If we don’t seek God’s will during difficult times, we tend to make irrational and unwise decisions that may look like good options at the time.



During what times in your life have you acted impulsively during a time of trial or grief? How did it turn out?

Question
2

Principle In Action



More than anyone who walked the face of this earth, Jesus experienced persecution and trials. On the night He was arrested, He had gone with His disciples to the

Principle In Action—continued



Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Jesus knew what the rest of the night and the next day entailed—His arrest, crucifixion, and death. Under tremendous stress, Jesus began to sweat drops of blood as He prayed fervently ([Luke 22:44](#)). Despite feeling great stress just like we do, Jesus' prayer centered around the Father's will when He asks, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" ([Luke 22:42](#)). In this moment, Jesus acted according to the will of the Father rather than any impulsive temptation that He may have had to flee from His responsibility to be the perfect sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. Jesus, through His prayer, shows us how that even when faced with great trials and stress that we ought to focus on the will of the Lord.

During what other times did you seek the will of God in prayer during a time of trial? In what way did God help you to overcome it?

Question
3

Psalm 143:5-8

REFLECT ON GOD'S CHARACTER AND WORK:

When we feel **overwhelmed** or **distressed**, we ought to reflect on God's character and work as we pray. In verse 5, David declares that he **remembers the days of old** and he **meditates** on God's **works**. In other

words, he reflects on all the ways that God has manifested His presence in his life. When we search the biblical record, we encounter story after story in which God worked faithfully within the lives of His people—whether individually or collectively. In our own lives, we ought to be able to point to specific times which God has acted to deliver us, protect us, provide for us, or comfort us. As we ponder on these things, we should express our gratitude, but it should also help us to have hope by reminding us how faithful and loving God has been and will continue to be in our lives.

What faithful works of God can you recall in your life?

Question
4

Because of God's faithfulness in the past, David readily offers a worshipful prayer to Him by the raising of his **hands** ([v. 6](#)). His **soul longs** for communication with the Lord just as a parched person longs for water in the desert. David doesn't just view prayer as a complaint forum or a therapy session, but He sees it as a time of worship and confession where he can seek guidance from the Creator of this universe. Certainly, he finds comfort in prayer as his **spirit fails**, but he has confidence that when he has a right relationship God will not **hide** His **face** nor will He abandon him **like those in the pit** ([v. 7](#)). As he reflects on God's character, David declares his confidence in the Lord because of God's **lovingkindness** which inspires **trust** ([v. 8](#)). Prayer shouldn't be something that we dread or consider laborious, but we should **long** to enter fellowship with the Lord. We should pray to God during our successes as much as we do during our struggles.

In-Depth Information



The word translated “*lovingkindness*” ([KJV](#), [NKJV](#), [NASB](#)) is a difficult Hebrew concept to capture in English. It has been variously translated as “unfailing love” ([NIV](#), [NLT](#)), “steadfast love” ([ESV](#)), or “faithful love” ([HCSB](#)). The HCSB translation “faithful love” is perhaps the closest to the original meaning. The word literally means God’s faithfulness to His covenants; thus, God’s love, as David knows well, is expressed through His faithfulness to us through His Word.

After reflecting on God’s character and work, David asks God to help him **know the way which he should walk** ([v. 8](#)). When we have a relationship with the Lord, He transforms the way that we live to match His holy standards. God desires that we live within the boundaries that He has established so that we may have an abundant life; He has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell within us as a guide who helps us to make the right choices which honor and glorify Him. Even though we have been transformed through the blood of Christ, we still retain the propensity to sin and err because of our human nature, so we need to pray that God will guide our steps and keep us from going down the wrong path which leads to sin. Each of us has our own distinctive areas in which we are susceptible to sin, based on our personalities and choices in life; therefore, we must daily



pray to God for strength to overcome the temptations we face (see also [1 Cor 10:13](#)). In fact, in the model prayer, Jesus teaches His disciples to pray: “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” ([Matt 6:13](#)).

How often do you stop and pray for deliverance from specific temptations you face? How did God help you to overcome your desires when you prayed? How does this contrast with the times you didn't pray?

Question
5

Psalm 143:9-12

RECOGNIZE GOD'S WILL:

Once again, David pleads with God to **deliver** him from his enemies for in the Lord he **takes shelter**—or finds refuge—during this time of need ([v. 9](#)). Yet in the midst of these struggles, David takes time to ask God to **teach him to do His will** and to lead him to do that which is **upright**.

Most of the time when we go through struggles we don't think about God's will or about living righteously; instead, we either wallow in our grief with self-pity or we constantly seek a way out of the struggle—whether a righteous way or not. In fact, most of the time we are focused on our circumstances and troubles rather than communicating with God to seek His **will**.



Notice in this passage that David doesn't pray to know God's **will** for his life, but rather that he might learn to **do** it; he already knows the basic tenets of God's **will** for his life without even asking. Generally, we can know God's will for our lives based on what He has taught us in His Word; therefore, God's will is not something that is mysterious or abstract in such a way that it can never really be known, but God has already clearly revealed it to each of us. God's will is that we have a healthy relationship with Him characterized by obedience, holy living, and regular fellowship. God desires that we remain in His Word so that we know how to live and that we might share it with others so that they might know how to have eternal life. These things we ought to do without hesitation or question. God may have a specific plan for our lives in how we apply these principles, but that doesn't give us the right to sit idly and do nothing under the guise that we're seeking God's will. Instead, we should be actively participating in God's plan and allowing Him to guide our steps as we seek to execute His will.

Why is it important that we pray God would teach us to do His will rather than merely to know it?

Question
6

Part of participating in God's will, as we learned in [verse 8](#), is to walk or live in a transformed way that represents God's **righteousness**. In [verse 11](#), David expresses this same concept in a different way when he asks God to **revive** him. Although David does desire God to deliver him from

his enemies, he more importantly wants God to **revive** or transform the way he lives. This becomes even more evident in [Psalm 119:37](#) when the psalmist interjects, “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and **revive** me in Your way.” In this section of [Psalm 119](#), which is an acrostic based on the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the author implores God not only to “teach” His commands to him, but also to help him “walk” accordingly. Just as in [Psalm 119:37](#), David here in [143:11](#) prays that God would perform a work of transformation to rid him of his sinful practices so that even in the midst of adversity he might be a testimony to God’s **righteousness**.

In what way has God revived you? In what ways is He still working to revive you?

Question
7

David ends his prayer by reiterating his request for God’s **mercy** to deliver him from his **enemies** ([v. 12](#)). He further asks God to judge his unrighteous **enemies** by **cutting** them **off** and **destroying** them. At first, we may find this request odd when Scripture teaches that we are to love and pray for our enemies ([Matt 5:44](#)). Far from being vindictive and hypocritical wishing harm to come to his enemies, David simply longs for the day in which God will exercise justice, vanquishing evil and vindicating the righteous who have a relationship with Him. Elsewhere in Scripture, those who have been killed because of their faith in Jesus are gathered under the heavenly altar in [Revelation 6:10](#) where they cry out: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Both David and these martyrs desire justice to be served—they don’t merely want violence and retribution

Instruct

for the sake of retaliating against their **enemies**. As a **servant** of God, we should pray for God's justice to become manifest, but we must not do it in a way that causes us to condemn others; only God, not man, has the right to issue decrees of judgment so it becomes imperative that we remain in God's will so that we know how we ought to pray for God's judgment to become manifest.

Why is the end of David's prayer not a license to pray harm for our enemies? How do we reconcile this with Jesus' teaching in the New Testament?

Question
8

Inspire

In order to discern God's will, we must first be in right relationship with Him. Just as David realized that every person has sinned and no one is righteous, George Washington also prays that he may not be drawn away from God by succumbing to temptation or the fleshly desires of this world which lead to sin. Because we all struggle with sin, we must pray daily for strength to flee temptation—not merely to endure it, but run away from it quickly. Many times we wait to pray until we are in the middle of a titanic struggle with temptation; however, often this is too late because we have already become overwhelmed and have decided to give in to the temptation. It's not that God can't help us endure the temptation, but it's just that our flesh is weak and waiting to pray until we are tempted gives us an opportunity to be indecisive leaving the

door open for us to commit sin. Therefore, we need to pray for strength before we even get to the point of needing to decide.

When we are in a right relationship with God, we can easily recognize His will for our lives. At the time George Washington wrote



the prayer printed in the introduction, he may have had no inkling on the specific path that his journey with the Lord would take him to become the president of the United States. Yet, he didn't sit around praying whether or not it was God's will for him to become a key Revolutionary general who would become the first president, but rather he prayed that God would help him to walk in such a way that it pleased Him and brought honor to Him. Washington, like David, focused on the things that God had clearly command in Scripture so that he lived in the right way—in other words that his life reflected God's will in the way that he lived. When we live in the right way, God will show us His larger plan for our lives step-by-step as we surrender and trust Him. As we pray, therefore, we need to focus on living the way that God has clearly outlined in His Word and trusting His Spirit to lead us daily according to the larger plan God has for us.

Incorporate

Over the course of this week we learned how to discern God's will through prayer. In order to discern God's will we must examine our lives and be in right standing with Him. In what areas of your life have you received mercy from God? In what areas do you need to confess, repent, and ask for God's mercy in your life to walk according to His way?

In what ways have you seen God's faithfulness displayed in your life? Spend time in prayer worshiping and praising God for His faithfulness to you.

We learned that the Bible reveals God's general will for our lives. In the lines provided, broadly state what God's will is for His people. Then pray and ask God to teach or help you **to do** His will.

In what ways has God transformed your life from before you were saved? In what ways has God revealed you still need to be transformed? Pray and ask God to continue to revive or renew you in such a way that you become a righteous testimony for Him.

March 26, 2017



The Wall that Hinders Prayer

Isaiah 1:2-18

Focal Verse:

"When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood."

Isaiah 1:15

Introduce

Many of us have routines in our lives in which we often engage in tasks without giving a second thought. As we go about our routines, we mindlessly repeat mundane tasks without ever thinking of the purposes or benefits behind them. As a new Christian, we may have once been eager to pray, read the Bible, and to serve in the church, but as time passed the newness wore off and it became an ordinary routine—something which we didn't intentionally undertake, but that casually and unconsciously happened over the course of time. Prayer, if we aren't careful, can become such a routine in which we mindlessly pray in the same way, at the same times, and for the same things without ever truly being engaged. At some point in our walk with Christ, almost every one of us has failed to view prayer as an awesome opportunity to converse with our Lord and Savior, instead we viewed it more as something to check off our list of things that we are “supposed” to do as a Christian. We must not let prayer become a ritualistic formula, but we should see it as a conversation with the One who loves us beyond any other person on earth.

For two years, I played in the marching band at Campbellsville University—a small, private Baptist college in South Central Kentucky. Like almost any church or institution, not everyone who attended had a personal relationship with Jesus, but no one objected or personally denounced



Introduce

any of the overt Christian practices we did as a group. Before any performance, whether a home football game or an exhibition at a public high school, we paused as a group to recite the [Lord's prayer](#). Traditionally, either the band director or the drum major led the prayer by asking us to remove our hats and bow our heads. In unison with a steady pace in hushed tones we began to say, "Our Father who art in heaven . . ." Although there is nothing wrong with reciting this model prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, it becomes ineffective and meaningless when we repeat a series of words without stopping to reflect on what they truly mean and how they apply to our lives. Saying the prayer certainly set an example for non-believers and gave honor to Christ, but God desires more than mere lip service; He desires an authentic relationship from the heart which means that we are in right standing and focused on Him.

Key Question

What attitude and actions become a wall that hinders prayer in our lives?

Isaiah 1:2-6

ALLOW GOD TO REVEAL HIMSELF THROUGH PRAYER: :

With a no-holds-barred approach, Isaiah figuratively comes out swinging to open this prophetic book when he lists all the charges against the wayward **children** of Israel who had **rebelled** against the Lord ([v. 2](#)).

He begins by invoking the **heavens and earth**—that is all creation—as witnesses against Israel. This formal sentencing would have reminded the people of the consequences of breaking the covenant which they had made with God in the wilderness and it also should have helped them to recognize how frequently they had violated it. In [Deut 30:19](#), Moses informs the people, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.” Israel, as we shall see, had not chosen the path which leads to life, but that which leads to death and destruction because they had **forsaken** God ([v. 3](#)). God has a special relationship with His people whom He has **nourished** and **brought up** as **children**. This signifies that God has provided for them as well as set boundaries for them so that they would mature as functional people who point others to Him. Despite all God has done for Israel, however, they have rejected Him and **rebelled against** Him.

God can use the heavens and earth as witnesses because they reveal His glory and all the inhabitants, whether living or inanimate, testify to His care and provision. Everything in creation recognizes that it owes its existence to God and that He is the source of sustaining it. Even though

Instruct

all creation knows God is its source of provision, the children of Israel, even with their special relationship with Him, have forgotten. To illustrate his point, Isaiah uses two animals: the **ox** and **the donkey** ([v. 3](#)). According to the prophet, the **ox knows its**



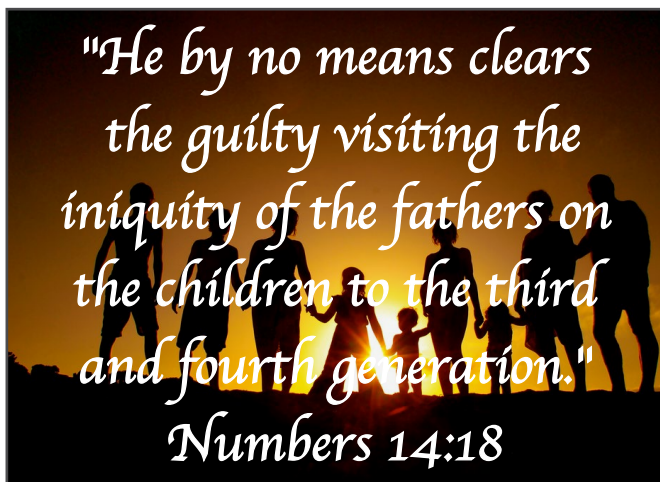
owner; the **owner** not only sets the boundaries and uses the **ox** according to his pleasure and purpose, but he also protects it and provides for it. Similarly, **the donkey** knows the source of its food—its **master's crib** or feeding trough. If these unintelligent, ordinary animals can recognize their master as their source of provision, so should Israel be able to recognize the Lord as their Master. Yet, this is the most egregious charge levied against her—she **does not know** her Lord nor does she **consider** who her Provider is. In fact, Israel has polluted herself with idolatry; she has begun mixing the worship of the gods of the nations around them with that of the only true and living God, Yahweh.

In what ways can we see God's care and provision demonstrated in the natural world around us? Why are people responsible for their failure to know God?

Question
1

Because Israel has violated her covenant with the Lord and worshiped other gods, Isaiah engages in a descriptive barrage of charges in [verse 4](#).

He calls her a **sinful nation**, a **people** known by their **iniquity**, and a **brood of evildoers**. The nation as a whole is thoroughly corrupt even though outwardly they still try to act religious by performing ritualistic ceremonies devoid of any heart-felt meaning; in fact, they have **forsaken** God and **turned away** from Him. This act of rebellion and sin then becomes cyclical from generation to generation; thus, Israel doesn't function as a family which brings up her **children** in the ways of the Lord as He had intended, but instead she teaches her children evil (see [Deut. 6:5-9](#)). As a result, the children no longer know and serve the Lord, but rather they have become **corrupters** of successive generations passing on a legacy of sinfulness rather than one of a heritage in the Lord. In [Numbers 14:18](#), Moses warns the children that this would happen if they forsake the Lord: "The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation." When we turn to our selfish desires and act impulsively on our own, in effect we are telling God that we don't want Him to interfere in our lives. God doesn't merely want us to go through the motions without any conscious effort to serve Him, but rather He wants us to have a viable relationship whereby He works through us to bring about a more abundant life and in order to do this we must live holy lives through His mercy and forgiveness.



In-Depth Information



In [verse 4](#), Isaiah declares that the people **have forsaken the Lord**. The word that Isaiah has chosen for **forsaken** is also used of **divorce**. Therefore, in a way, the people have divorced or separated themselves from the Lord and want nothing to do with Him. Yet, God is our benevolent, loving Provider who cares for us beyond many ways that we can comprehend; to go our own way and reject Him is an affront to His love and provision for us!

In what ways can you see generational trends that have moved people away from the Lord? What does it take to overcome these trends and return to the Lord?

Question
2

After bringing the charge of sinfulness against Israel, in [verses 5-6](#) Isaiah describes them as chronically ill even though they don't recognize the symptoms of their ailment. Before being diagnosed with diabetes, for several years I unknowingly lived with the symptoms; I constantly was tired, frequently had headaches and spells of dizziness, and was continually thirsty. My problem was exacerbated by



an unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyle, but because I wasn't aware that I had diabetes I did nothing to change it nor did I report it to a doctor because to me the symptoms seemed isolated and explainable by other factors like stress. In the same way, Isaiah laments through a rhetorical question about what good it would do for God to **stricken** them **again** with punishment for they would **revolt more and more** because they don't know that they are actually sickened and dysfunctional because of sin ([v. 5](#)). Israel did not know that she was in trouble for her sin because she had completely forgotten and abandoned the ways in which God wanted them to walk; to them, they were blissfully unaware of their sin and their lives seemed normal so they did nothing to correct their sinfulness by seeking forgiveness from God.

We can learn two principles from the way in which Isaiah describes the sickness of sin in these two verses. First, sin affects our entire lives; Isaiah notes that their **whole head is sick** and their **whole heart faints** ([v. 5](#)). In [verse 6](#), he continues to describe how they are utterly sick from **the sole of their foot** to their **head**. In contemporary Western thinking, we tend to compartmentalize our lives and we think that one part of our lives will not affect the other, but when sin enters into the picture it affects every part of our lives; it affects our jobs, our relationships, our finances, our health, and especially our relationship to God. When we sin, everything is affected and we must take measures to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God so that we can be made whole. Second, the **wounds** that Isaiah lists are those which have come as a result of battle. Rebellion against God constitutes a battle with Him; we actually are fighting against the One who wants to protect and provide for us. We are subjecting ourselves to injury because we have abandoned His plan for

our lives and we wrongly believe that we know what's best.

Why is it important to ask God for a spiritual check-up when we pray? What are the symptoms of an unhealthy prayer life and relationship with the Lord?

Question
3

Isaiah 1:7-10

READ GOD'S WORD PRAYERFULLY:

After indicting the children of Israel for their sin, Isaiah now points out its consequences. God has allowed foreign invaders to destroy the land and attack the people. He describes their **country** as **desolate** and **overthrown** by **strangers** who **devour** everything in their **land** while they watch with horror ([v. 7](#)). Moreover, he depicts their homes as mere shacks built in a **vineyard** during the time of harvest to provide temporary shelter for those gathering the crops ([v. 8](#)). In essence, they have nothing. Yet, they have brought this destruction upon themselves because of their sin; they have no one else to blame because they are the ones who have forsaken the Lord.



During a time of harvest in ancient Israel, a farmer would use a temporary structure like this to stay in their fields rather than commuting back to his village.

Like the **wounds** and illnesses mentioned in [verses 5-6](#), the people remain oblivious as to the cause of their misfortune—sin. When we communicate with God through prayer, we need to not only have the right attitude, but we also need to ask God to help us evaluate our lives according to His perspective. If we merely look at things from a human perspective, we will almost always deceive ourselves into thinking that we are good enough, but when we see ourselves from God’s perspective it helps us to acknowledge our shortcomings and depend upon Him as our source of strength.

How does unconfessed sin hinder prayer? How should we seek God’s perspectives when we pray?

Question
4

Although the majority of Israel had sinned and was unfaithful to God, a **very small remnant** had not compromised and participated in the idolatry and debauchery of the nation as a whole ([v. 9](#)). For this reason, God had not utterly destroyed the nation. Without this remnant,

however, Israel would have met a fate similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. To the ear of any Israelite, a comparison to the wickedness of these two cities would have been reprehensible and insulting. With all the evil perpetrated by the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, God



Instruct

could not find even ten righteous people to spare these cities, but in Israel God has found a **very small remnant** that has not soiled itself with evil and degradation. Most of Israel, however, acted just like these two ancient cities that God destroyed. Just as He had given Sodom and Gomorrah a chance, He gives Israel another chance to repent and return to Him. Therefore, the prophet bids the wayward people to **hear the word of the Lord** ([v. 10](#)). When we **hear the word of the Lord** and we pray for guidance, it requires action—practicing what God teaches us. When we read God’s word prayerfully, it helps us to know God’s character and the boundaries which He has established for us, it helps us to learn from individual’s past mistakes and not to repeat them, and it reveals the areas in which we need to change in our own lives. Israel’s problem, however, was that most people paid no attention to God’s word and few practiced it in their lives.

What does it look like to read God’s word prayerfully?

Question
5

Isaiah 1:11-15

DO NOT LET PRAYER BECOME RITUALISTIC:

The people were outwardly religious and they still sacrificed to the Lord, but they did not have the right heart which made all their actions meaningless. Borrowing from [1 Samuel 15:22](#), Isaiah poses a question which he then proceeds to answer in a series of indictments once again

against the people: what good is **a multitude of sacrifices** when people remain steadfast in their sin and refuse to repent ([v. 11](#))? God doesn't take **delight in** outward actions without inward change, such as the slaughter of animals or the offering of **incense** ([v. 13](#)); the people didn't truly desire forgiveness and mercy. Moreover, God cannot tolerate their participation in religious festivals because He **cannot endure** their **iniquity** in His presence ([vv. 13-14](#))—their actions are merely for show and have no substance. When they **pray** lifting up their **hands**, God declares that He **hides** His **eyes** and will not listen to their prayers because their hearts are full of deceit and violence ([v. 15](#)).

We may not offer **sacrifices** and **incense** today, but many people still just go through the motions. We could pose the question this way: What good does it do to come to church once or twice a week and not have a right heart which seeks a substantive relationship with the Lord? Many people “attend” church, but their



lives are not transformed; many people try to “serve” God, but they continue to live sinful lives. God **does not delight in** church attendance, service, financial giving, and legalistic prayer and Bible study. When we have a right relationship with God, we will attend church, serve, give, pray, and study His word out of devotion to Him and not some obligation to fulfill a checklist; thus, we will engage in these actions because of our authentic relationship with Him which governs the way that we live daily; this authentic devotion is what pleases God. Consequently, one of the main tenets of our prayers should be seeking true repentance and

forgiveness and not merely going through the motions because those are the things that we are “supposed” to do.

In what ways do we go through the motions today? How does this affect our prayer life?

Question
6

Isaiah 1:16-18

SEEK REPENTANCE THROUGH PRAYER:

In order for God to accept our worship and hear our prayers, we must be in right standing with Him. Therefore, Isaiah compels the people to **wash** ridding themselves of their **evil doings** ([v. 16](#)); they are to **cease** participating in **evil** and **learn to do good** and **seek justice** ([v. 17](#)). In other words, Isaiah is telling them to repent of their evil ways and return to God who will forgive. Although salvation is a one-time commitment to God, we will still need to seek forgiveness when we err. Because we still live have our human nature, we are prone to sin even though we have a relationship with God through Jesus; therefore, we must not only pray that God would help us overcome temptation, but we must also repent and seek forgiveness when we do sin. If we pray with a sincere heart and humbly request forgiveness, God is faithful and merciful to forgive us. For this reason, Isaiah declares that God will take our **sins, though** they be **like scarlet** and **red** as **crimson**, and He will wash them and make them **white as snow**—in other words, God will cleanse us and purify us from all our unrighteousness if we ask in obedience with all sincerity ([v. 18](#)).

If we feel that we have hit a wall that hinders our prayer, therefore, let us first make sure that we are in right standing with the Lord and that we are truly serving Him out of devotion rather than simply going through the motions.

As you have studied this week, what has God brought to your minds for which you should repent?

Question
3

Inspire

This week we learned the dangers of simply going through the motions rather than having an authentic relationship with God. In the church today, this may be the number one problem that hinders personal growth. In a modern world governed by computers, electronics, and a hectic extracurricular schedule, people rush to get things done and they still find that they don't have "enough time." Perhaps, even as you read this lesson, you found yourself short on time, so you merely read the book at the last minute to get an "overview" without spending time meditating upon Scripture. Maybe you even skimmed the book without taking time to pray and answer the questions honestly to evaluate your life. Many things in life vie for our attention, so we must ask ourselves: what's most important to me? If God's most important in your life, we need to spend the quality time with Him He deserves. If He's not, then you need to re-evaluate your relationship with Him, repent, and seek forgiveness just as Isaiah implored Israel.

When we merely go through the motions and do things like a checklist,

it has little benefit for us because we are not engaged and devoted to the task. For example, it's like reading a book or article in which our mind is elsewhere; we finish the article and then wonder what we have just read so that we need to re-read it to understand. Similarly, it's like driving a certain route to work or home; we train ourselves that when we get to an intersection we go a certain way so that one day when we are going to a different locale we realize halfway down the road that we are going in the wrong direction because our mind was disengaged and we took the exit to go to work. Every one of us has done at least one of these two things and probably both. We can't afford to disengage our minds and go through the motions with God because it can lead to disastrous consequences in our lives. We need to carve out a time daily that we can spend quality time with God with the least number of distractions possible so that we can hear Him speak. We need to communicate directly with Him with sincere hearts and obedient spirits so that He can transform us and shape us into the person He wants us to be in Him.

Incorporate

As you studied [Isaiah 1:2-18](#) this week, what did God reveal to you about His character? How does this help you to know Him better as your Master?

How does sin affect our relationship with God, especially in prayer? Spend time in prayer and ask God to reveal any sin in your life for which you need to confess and seek forgiveness.

Incorporate

As you pray, ask God to help you examine your motives for serving Him? If there is any area in which are you merely going through the motions, write it on the following lines. Then ask God to help you to strengthen your relationship with Him and serve Him with an authentic attitude and contrite spirit.

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