

Walking With God Through Prayer

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*To my parents
Wayne and Carol Sterling
who taught me the importance of
walking with God through prayer.*



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CONTENTS

Introduction		7
Week 1: Seeking God		
Day 1	Challenged To Pray	9
Day 2	Compelled Not To Pray	13
Day 3	Compelled To Pray	19
Day 4	Conviction Established Part 1	24
Day 5	Conviction Established Part 2	29
Week 2: Sharing With God		
Day 1	Praying With Honesty	35
Day 2	Praying With Humility	39
Day 3	Praying With Faith	43
Day 4	Praying With Consistency	48
Day 5	Praying With Certainty	54
Week 3: Searching God's Word		
Day 1	Letting God Speak	59
Day 2	Listening With Obedience	64
Day 3	Leaving All Behind	69
Day 4	Letting Jesus Lead	74
Day 5	Learning The Truth	78
Week 4: Serving God		
Day 1	Seeking God	83
Day 2	Surrendering To God	87
Day 3	Standing For God	92
Day 4	Steadfast With God	96
Day 5	Sharing God With Others	99
Conclusion		107



INTRODUCTION

Many churches today are full of activity, religion, and programs, but where is the joy? Where is the peace? Where is the power? The problem is that God never meant for us to do our duty at church and home, while we live in inner defeat with little or no impact on the world. He intends that we live abundantly by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. It is God's desire for us to fully realize joy, peace and power. He wants our lives to be a living testimony to the lost world. He wants us to be powerful witnesses of His salvation!

Jesus modeled joy, peace and power during His life here on earth, and His life wasn't easy. He was constantly, passionately sharing His plan of salvation with the lost people around Him. He was constantly discipling and encouraging His fellow believers. All the while, He willingly embraced shame, pain, suffering and death on the cross for us. How did He do it? He walked with His Father God in prayer. He loves us and died for us that through prayer we also can live a passionate, surrendered life in power for Him. Are you living that life?

The purpose of this material is to help us learn to walk with God through prayer as Jesus did. Jesus practiced a private prayer life that directly determined the way He lived. What is your private prayer life like? Does it affect your public witness? It can and it should. You see, God desires that our praying not end with meals or with a Sunday morning worship service. God wants to communicate with us throughout our day wherever we go. He wants to spill out of our lives to all those around us who are living without salvation in Christ. This kind of communication with Jesus results in our lives becoming a powerful testimony to the lost around us for His glory and our joy.

The four weeks in this study will reveal how we can walk with God and talk with Him daily. Do you desire to walk with God in this way? If so, I invite you to pick up this study and commit the next four weeks of your life to learning, changing and growing in prayer. This change will lead you to be a concerned witness for Jesus wherever you go. This walk with God through prayer will not remove all challenges and hardships from your life, but as you walk closely with Him, you will know your life has purpose in Christ. You will see God use you to encourage others and you will be a witness of a life Jesus has changed. You will find joy, peace and power through being used by Him for his glory. Let's get started on our journey!

WWG
THROUGH PRAYER



Week 1 – Step 1 SEEKING GOD

Week 1 SEEKING GOD

Day 1

Challenged To Pray

We face the real danger of true prayer becoming extinct in the church today. You may argue this point and say this could never occur. We will continue to pray for the offering, meals, and the sick. Maybe so, but are we progressing toward a generation that will not be able to find a man or woman who models a life of prayer?

For too many people, prayer has become a drudgery instead of a delight. It has become a nonessential. In seminary class one day, Dr. Jack Magorman made a comment that I have never forgotten about the drudgery of prayer in the church. He said, “Those in our churches who cannot stand a thirty minute prayer meeting in the presence of God, for them heaven will be hell.” Wow! That sounds harsh, but think about it. Heaven is going to be a forever relationship with God.

The goal of this study is to take you beyond desire or defeat to understanding and application. If you already have a meaningful prayer life, let God take you even deeper. Pray right now. Ask God to teach you to pray as you seek Him through this study (Luke 11:1). Write your prayer in the margin.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel

(Judges 2:10)

“Lord, teach us to pray...”

(Luke 11:1)

“... we will tell the next
generation the praise
worthy deeds of the Lord,
his power and the wonders
He has done.”

(Psalm 78:4)

Let's begin by looking at three examples of people who walked with God through prayer. I will share a personal example, an Old Testament example, and a New Testament example.

Personal Example

As a teenager, my room was in the basement of the house. Half of our basement was a finished bedroom and half was an unfinished laundry and storage room. To get to the unfinished side of the basement, a person would have to walk through my room. I remember many nights lying in bed almost asleep and my dad would quietly walk through my room to the unfinished side to complete his chores for the day. Lying still in the darkness of my room, I listened through the wall to my father talk to his heavenly Father. I often marveled at my father's consistency to pray; the realness of his prayers impressed me. Prayer was such an important part of my father's life that it was as natural to him as breathing. His example taught me more about prayer than any class on prayer ever could have, and it definitely challenged me to pray.

- Note a person you believe models a life of prayer.

- How is that person's life different from your own?

- What are concrete ways you have seen prayer make a difference in his or her life?

- How has his or her life affected your life?

Old Testament Example

In the Old Testament, in Genesis 6, we are confronted with the challenge to walk with God from a man named Noah. The first words used to describe this man are incredible. It says that Noah, “. . . was a *righteous* man, *blameless* among the people of his time, and he *walked with God*.”

It is my prayer that you will be a righteous and blameless person who walks with God. Read Genesis 6:9 – 8:22. After reading the passage fill in the verses in the margin. Then, answer the following question:

1. What do you think it means to talk to God?

2. Why do you think God chose to talk to Noah?

3. Do you think God wants to talk with you?

New Testament Example

In the New Testament, the life of Jesus exemplifies that prayer is a must not a maybe. Prayer for Jesus was not optional; it was continual. Watch and evaluate how the life of Jesus challenged others to walk with God through prayer.

Luke 11:1 records that Jesus was praying in a certain place. This certain place is an indication that Jesus was regularly talking to God. In Jesus' consistency to pray, His life became a model of prayer. His example impacted the disciples and caused them to want what Jesus had. They asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Prayer was such a priority in Jesus' life that the disciples longed to have what he had.

Week 1

SEEKING GOD

Noah Walked With God

Genesis 6:13

So God _____
to Noah,

Genesis 6:22

Noah did _____
Just as God
commanded him.

Genesis 7:1

The Lord then _____
to Noah,

Genesis 7:5

And Noah did _____
that the LORD
commanded him.

Genesis 8:15, 16a

Then God _____
To Noah, “Come out of
the ark,

Genesis 8:18

So Noah _____,
Together with his sons
and his wife and his sons'
wives.

This is what we all need: a challenge to pray. Jesus is challenging us today to pray; and he can, because he did. Jesus is not asking us to do what he did not model. His model inspired the disciples and it should inspire us. If we don't begin to model prayer as Jesus did, we may raise a generation of prayerless Christians. If this happens, Satan will be filled with joy. You see, a generation of prayerless Christians is a generation of powerless Christians. God forbid that such a day will come. It is my prayer that we accept the challenge to pray from godly people we know, from Bible characters we read about, and most of all from our Savior Jesus.

With urgency, I pray God will raise up millions of believers who long for prayer. When this occurs, God's people will reject the ritual and go for the relationship. Churches will see less religion and routine and more heaven-sent revival. Will you be part of the revival?

Prayer For The Day

Dear Lord my desire is to model a life of prayer. Reveal to me whatever may be hindering my prayer life. Do whatever it takes so my heart may say, "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." Psalm 84:2

Day 2

Week 1
SEEKING GOD

Compelled NOT To Pray

We are inspired by Jesus' example of seeking God early in the morning (Mk 1:35). It must be noted that even in Jesus' case, this did not happen without a struggle. In Mark 1:37, the disciples said to Jesus, "Everyone is looking for you!" There was a human tug on Jesus' life pulling him away from prayer, just as there will always be influences compelling us not to pray.

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

(Mk. 1:35)

People sought Jesus constantly because he was healing the sick and casting out demons. Yet he did not let that keep him from prayer. On the other hand, we are often drawn away from prayer by lesser things. It truly is a challenge to stay focused and do a few things well. We must not just stay busy, but we must be wise and live our lives with purpose.

Families today have opportunities to be actively involved in more activities than ever before. Everything and everyone is bidding for our time and money. Now with the speed of communication and transportation, we can learn more, communicate more, and do more.

Recently, I was walking through a large sports store in Atlanta. As I was looking around, I began to calculate the time and money needed to participate in the sporting activities that interested me. To my right was the golf section. To my left was the camping section; above me were kayaks; in front of me were bikes; behind me were running shoes. There were treadmills, weights, and a rock-climbing wall. And what about tennis, basketball, softball, hunting, fishing, and skiing?

I knew that to achieve a level of competency in any one of these sports it would require a certain amount of time and money. I began to calculate my time commitment to God, family, work, community, and hobbies. Wait, I needed to calculate my wife's need for a hobby, my son's desire to play sports, and my girls' activities. Then I remembered my commitments to help friends and family with their projects of interest. As my mind processed my time commitments, my brain began to hurt. None of these things were evil, but to misplace them on my list of priorities could be tragic.

Satan has so many Christians distracted in good things, they can't find the time to do the really important things. Just because something is not obviously evil, does not mean it may not be dangerously evil. It is evil if it keeps us from fulfilling God's plan.

Through prayer we will find the purpose God has for our lives. As we study Mark chapter one, watch Jesus handle the challenge of staying focused on fulfilling God's plan.

Step 1 - Read Mark 1:9-45 carefully and make notes in the margin as you consider the following questions: What was the focus of Jesus' ministry? How did Satan try to distract Jesus? What were the other distractions in his life? How did he overcome them both? How can you relate to the disciples? How are you like the people who crowded around Jesus?

Step 2 - Evaluate what Jesus was doing when He started his ministry:

Mark 1:14-15 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee,

_____ the _____ of God.

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near.

_____ and believe the _____!"

Mark 1:21 They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus

went into the synagogue and began to _____.

Mark 1:25 Jesus cast a demon out.

Mark 1:31 Jesus healed a fever.

Mark 1:34 Jesus healed various diseases and drove out demons.

It is clear to see in these two steps that Jesus knew His calling: to preach repentance and the good news. He still healed people, and drove out demons, but He did not let the miracles crowd out his Father's purpose for His life.

The crowds were amazed and enamored with Jesus. It says in verse 28 that the news spread about Jesus. In verse 33, it says the whole town gathered. The next morning we find in verse 37 that everyone was looking for Jesus. Why? It is simple; they wanted to be healed and have relief from demons.

Wouldn't we want some healing and relief? Of course we would. There is nothing wrong with driving out demons and healing the sick unless it distracted Jesus from His primary mission to preach the gospel. As important as healing and relief were, the more important objective was to preach the good news. Jesus had come to save the world for eternity, not to just give temporal relief.

Stop for a moment and try to imagine the incredible temptation it was for Jesus to stay put and please the people with His power instead of obeying God to preach the gospel. Jesus was an instant celebrity. In our society we would have been writing a book about His life and making Him into a movie star.

In fact, Jesus' newly called disciples urged him to come and meet the needs of the people. To their surprise, Jesus plainly said no. I can hear them asking, "Why not?" Maybe we should be asking, "Why not?" Why didn't Jesus go meet all the needs of the people?

If we ask this question, we will find that Jesus was able to say no because he had gotten a word from God about his purpose. Such direction came through His private time of prayer with God. Confidence and resolve streamed from Jesus as the day began and the pressures of the day mounted. Jesus was able to resist the temptation to let people control His life, because He spent time with His Father first in prayer.

Week 1 SEEKING GOD

"Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God?"

Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."

(Galatians 1:10)

Step 3 - Evaluate and meditate on Jesus' response:

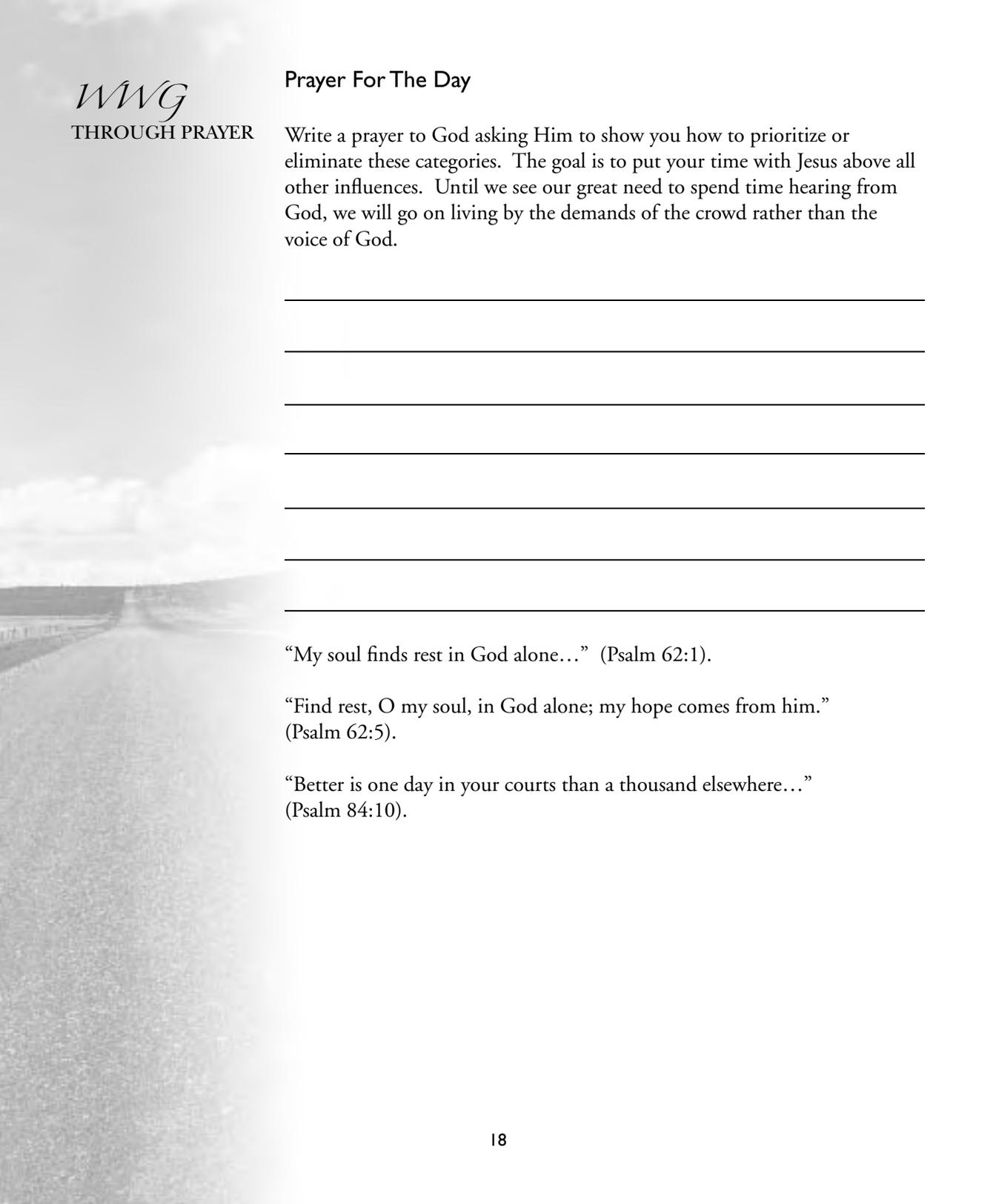
Mark 1:38-39 Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages—so I can _____ there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, _____ in their synagogues and driving out demons.

It is obvious that the people were compelling Jesus not to pray. It may have been unintentional, but the human pleas became a distraction to the will of God.

Action Steps

How often are you distracted from seeking God because you are drawn into the world by the appeals of humanity over the voice of God? How can we expect to obey God if we are not communicating with God? The answer to this question is, we can't!

What about you? Are people crowding around you urging you to meet their needs, live for their agenda and cause, get on their committee? How often are you distracted from seeking God because you are drawn into the appeals of humanity over the voice of God? How can we expect to obey God if we are not communicating with God? The answer to this question is, we can't! That is why it is so urgent that we get a word from God about His will for our time. Man will always have plenty of "good" things for us to do. How tragic if we spend our lives doing man's good in vain and miss out on God's best for us for eternity.



WWG

THROUGH PRAYER

Prayer For The Day

Write a prayer to God asking Him to show you how to prioritize or eliminate these categories. The goal is to put your time with Jesus above all other influences. Until we see our great need to spend time hearing from God, we will go on living by the demands of the crowd rather than the voice of God.

“My soul finds rest in God alone...” (Psalm 62:1).

“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.”
(Psalm 62:5).

“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere...”
(Psalm 84:10).

Day 3

Week 1

SEEKING GOD

Compelled To Pray

After dealing with all the things that compel us not to pray, we must consider what will compel us to pray. Most of us may find prayer on our to do list rather than our list of passions. Many find prayer time consuming and difficult. If you feel this way, do not be discouraged. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Prayer must be learned, it cannot be programmed, ritualized, or inherited. Prayer is learning to walk with God through seeing our deep need for God.

While in seminary, I experienced this deep need for God through a class called The Spring Practicum. The purpose of this class was to send pastors all across the country to preach revival services during spring break. I was assigned to preach in Morgantown, West Virginia. Excited about God doing a great work in the upcoming revival services, I prepared and planned for weeks.

On my day of departure, I awoke pumped up about preaching in West Virginia. I loaded my bags and began my hour and half drive to the Dallas Fort Worth Airport. While driving I felt a little funny, but thought nothing of it. Praying while driving down the road, I asked God that many would get saved during the upcoming revival. I parked my car, checked my bags, found my way to the gate and boarded the plane.

Now airborne, I settled in and began to read my Bible. About three fourths of the way through the flight I began to feel sick. Light headed and dizzy, I looked around for an empty row where I could lie down. I looked in front of me and then behind me, but all I could see was people. The plane was completely full.

As a precaution, I decided to walk back to the restroom in case I needed a brown bag (you know what I mean). I stood up, took two steps toward the back and immediately knew that I was in trouble. Weak as a wet noodle, I had only one option; lie down or fall down.

WWG THROUGH PRAYER

*Let us then approach
the throne of grace with
confidence, so that we
may receive mercy and
find grace to help us in
our time of need.*

(Hebrews 4:16)

*You say, 'I am rich; I have
aquired wealth and do not
need a thing.' But you do not
realize that you are wretched,
pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

(Revelation 3:17)

As gracefully as possible, I fell to my knees and sprawled out in the floor of the plane. Lying on the floor of a 737 in a suit and tie makes for an interesting sight. Heads were turning so fast I feared a few people might fall into the floor with me.

Flight attendants came running from both directions. Arriving they said, "Sir, you must get up." Moaning, I mumbled, "I can't get up." A sound like a low hum filled the plane as people began to talk about the incident. They managed to get me to the front of the plane, and strapped me into the flight attendants seat for landing.

The plane pulled up to the gate, the door opened and there stood the police. They placed me in a wheel chair and pushed me to the side and began to ask me questions. Figuring that I was on drugs, they asked, "Where are you going; what is your occupation?" They hurled question after question at me, I did my best to explain that I was a preacher going to preach a revival.

Finally, they strapped me to a golf cart and drove me to the nurse's station. While being examined, the nurse handed me a note from some friendly travelers. The note was an attempt to witness to me and recommend some good books for overcoming alcoholism. Can you imagine? I was a preacher, coming across as a drug addict and alcoholic.

Flat on my back in the nurse's station overcome by a powerful flu, I wondered how I was going to preach a revival. I pleaded with God to speak. "Please God, give me an answer; give me some direction." In answer to my pleas, God impressed on my mind, "You're in need, depend on me." I knew my need for God at that moment, but did I know it before getting sick and being humiliated in front of hundreds of people?

The point is, until we see our need for God, we will never see our need to pray. Effective praying is always birthed out of a need for God. Once we see our need for God, we will be compelled to pray. Jesus was compelled to pray because He needed God.

Mark 1:35 says, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” Can you believe it? Jesus was compelled to pray. We might think that Jesus, the Son of God, our Savior, would not need to pray. Such a thought is far from the truth. Jesus needed God.

Jesus knew that communication with the Father was imperative, not optional. In the busy, fast paced, high-pressured world we live in today, prayer can easily become a low priority. When we believe everything is under control, we usually don't see our need for God; and prayer becomes optional. Then a need arises, and we find ourselves crying out to God. Don't misunderstand me at this point. God wants to hear our prayers in crucial times, but foremost, God desires to communicate with us daily. He wants us to be aware of His presence, and of our desperate need for Him throughout the day.

As a young boy I remember my father preaching and telling the story of the man working on a roof. Dad would say, “There was a man working on a steep roof. As he was working he slipped and began to fall. Rapidly sliding down the roof the man knew he would probably die or be paralyzed from the fall. Panicked, the man called out to God saying, “Save me God, save me!” As the man reached the edge of the roof, the belt loop on his pants caught a nail. The man regained his stability and started back up the roof. On his way back up to the top the man said to God, “Never mind God; everything is ok.” This is called living by ‘hang nail’ theology.”

God does not want our prayer life to be driven by “hang nail” theology. He wants us to seek Him in troubled times, but He also wants us to establish a relationship of walking with Him before facing difficult days. Just as Jesus needed to pray, so do we today.

Week 1 SEEKING GOD

*Action without prayer
is arrogance, but
prayer without action
is hypocrisy.*

Action Steps

Examine David's prayers in Psalm 27 and Psalm 63:1-8.
Let God speak to your heart about your great need for Him.

1. List the ways David saw his need for God.

2. What was David's relationship with God? Explain your answer with the scripture you read.

3. Compare and contrast your prayer life with David's. What are the similarities and what are the differences?

4. What changes do you need to make to have a prayer life flowing out of a great need and passion for God?

If you are willing to learn, God is waiting to *teach you*. It will not be long before you realize that prayer is not a hassle but an honor. Before you know it, you will be longing for more time to pray because you will have so much you want to talk to God about.

Week 1 SEEKING GOD

Prayer For The Day

Take time to ask God to give you a passion for Him. Ask that you would know your deep need for Him daily. Ask that He would compel you to pray more and more often as you live life. Choose a Scripture from the Psalms, which you can meditate upon today (Joshua 1:8).

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

(Luke 11:1)

Day 4

Conviction Established – Part I

“God’s Word would be the deciding factor for all His decisions.”

We marvel at Jesus’ commitment to get up early, hear from God and not be influenced by men. We wish we could be that committed, but are wishes enough? How do we really achieve our goals in life? Let’s look at people who decide they want to lose weight. Do they lose weight just because they want to? NO, they have to establish a conviction that will influence them to take the action needed to accomplish their desire.

Whatever our goals in life may be, we must establish convictions that lead to taking action. Intentions alone are not enough. God wants us to develop a conviction from God’s Word that we can’t live without prayer. Until we have a conviction that we must pray, we won’t pray. We may attend a Wednesday night prayer time, or pray occasionally riding down the road, but it will not develop into a daily walk with God until conviction is established.

Jesus had established a conviction that compelled Him to pray. What was the conviction? The conviction He established was that *God’s Word would be the deciding factor for all His decisions.*

Take time to read Mt. 3:13-17 and Mt. 4:1-11 and write down in the margin all the ways you see Jesus and God communicating.

Week 1
SEEKING GOD

Now write down the convictions lived out in Jesus' life based on His communication with God:

Matthew 3:13-17

Matthew 4:1-11

Finally, write down the things that could have distracted Jesus from prayer.

You may be asking, "What does Jesus' baptism have to do with prayer?" Jesus' baptism reveals that God spoke, Jesus listened, Jesus obeyed, and God was pleased. Now that Jesus had obeyed in baptism God could reveal the next step. The next step would be for Jesus to spend forty days and nights in prayer (Matt. 4:1,2).

The order here is important. Jesus' baptism preceded His time of prayer in the wilderness. In both examples, Jesus was communicating with God. It is key to understand we can't properly experience the wilderness before the baptism. The first step in prayer is to obey whatever God has already called us to do.

One Sunday morning, during the invitation, a young mother came forward. As the lady came closer and closer to the front, I wondered why she was coming. I was puzzled because she was active in the life of the church. Her troubled countenance shortly turned to relief as she expressed her desire to be baptized. She was saved as a teenager, but had never followed Christ in baptism. Why did this take so long and why was it so hard? Two key reasons jump out. One, she worried what her family would think of her. Second, she had slipped away from God in her teen years and had not lived a lifestyle that honored God.

Satan had been using fear and worldly pleasure to keep one of God's children from knowing the joy and power received from obedience. As this young mother began to grow spiritually, God revealed to her that she needed to crawl before she could walk or run. How could she tell others to follow Christ and be baptized, if she had never been baptized?

Have you been spiritually crippled because you refused to be obedient to the truth God showed you? If so, it is because you have yet to establish the conviction Jesus established, to accept *God's Word as the deciding factor for all decisions.*

Action Steps

Take a few minutes and ask God if you need to be obedient in any of the following areas of truth. If God speaks to you, listen closely, obey immediately, and God will be pleased.

_____ Baptism

_____ Church Membership / Active Service

_____ Tithing

_____ Telling Others How Jesus Changed Your Life

_____ Reading Your Bible

_____ Spending Time In Prayer

_____ Forgiving Those Who Have Hurt You

Week 1

SEEKING GOD



Take a few minutes to study the following formula and then use the blanks underneath to apply the formula to your own life:

Conviction About God's Word + Obedience to God's Word = Answered Prayer

Example:

Biblical Conviction - Eph. 4:29 "Do not let any
+ unwholesome talk come
out of your mouth

Action Taken - Stop gossiping.

=

Answered Prayer - Peace with co-workers & greater
opportunity to witness.

Biblical Conviction - _____

+

Action Taken - _____

=

Answered Prayer - _____

Prayer For The Day

Write a prayer asking God to establish the above conviction in every area of your life:

Day 5

Week 1
SEEKING GOD

Conviction Established – Part 2

The power of suggestion can move people toward action. I recall as a child making a suggestion to my sister that landed me in great trouble. Growing up as children in McComb, Mississippi, my sister Laura and I logged a lot of time playing together. One day I had a brilliant idea. I figured it would be fun to watch my sister scream. To accomplish this, I suggested that Laura follow me over to our family car to conduct a neat experiment. When we crawled into the car, I told her to push the round circle that was on the lower part of the dashboard. “Why?” she asked. I explained that it would pop out and make a bright red color. Following my suggestion, she pushed in the cigarette lighter and it popped out. Pulling the lighter out, I said, “Go ahead and touch it.” With wonder in her eyes, she touched the glowing red coils. Looking at me with horror in her eyes, she began screaming with pain. It was not long before I was screaming with pain after being touched not by a lighter, but by a hickory switch. Two kids in pain make for a sorry experiment.

Not all suggestions are bad ones, but we need to establish convictions that equip us to distinguish between God’s voice and Satan’s suggestions. Satan’s suggestions are luring Christians down paths of destruction at rapid rates. He is convincing believers that the philosophies of the world are the standards for making decisions in life.

Satan’s suggestions to us might include

1. You are a pillar in the church, think how foolish you would look if you went forward and repented.
2. You have given God enough, take a little time and do your own thing.
3. Life is so demanding that you are entitled to ease your nerves with whatever comfort you desire. You may choose materialism, alcohol, overeating, or anything that makes you feel better.

4. You have a right to be angry! Holding a grudge is justified in this case. It is not fair the way you have been treated.

5. You are a strong Christian; the movies you watch, the books you read and the web pages you surf won't affect your actions. After all, thinking and doing are two separate things, aren't they?

Listening to such suggestions can lead to entertaining such suggestions and ultimately to acting out such suggestions. Satan has led many people down the road of regret which ends in sleepless nights, strained or ruined relationships, money wasted, and damaged lives. If Satan can't doom us for eternity, he will settle for destroying our effectiveness here on earth.

Now here is the good news: Jesus shows us clearly how to establish convictions that will see through Satan's suggestions. Take time to carefully read Matthew 4:1-11. In the margin write down the suggestions you see Satan making in this passage. Also, note what you think is significant about Jesus' response to each suggestion.

Jesus handled these ungodly suggestions through prayer and the Word of God. It's clear to see that Jesus' conviction was to live solely and completely by God's Word. When we pray and depend on God's Word, we will be able to see through Satan's harmful suggestions and not get burned. Prayer is more than just a religious act; it is the power to overcome Satan's influence and live victoriously in Christ.

Jesus' three scriptural defenses empowered Him to say no to Satan and yes to God. These three defenses were not based just on scriptural knowledge alone. They contained an understanding and application of the scriptures also. Fill in the blanks below and evaluate Jesus' knowledge, understanding, and application of God's Word:

Week 1
SEEKING GOD

1st Jesus KNEW the Word.

Vs 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on _____ word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

2nd Jesus UNDERSTOOD the Word.

Vs 7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the _____.' "

3rd Jesus APPLIED the Word.

Vs 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: '_____ the Lord your God, and _____ him only.' "

When we know, understand, and apply the Word of God, we possess the power to say no to Satan and yes to God. This is conviction established.

Prayerfully evaluate if you are living by convictions based on the Word of God:

1. Read back over the worldly philosophies and list which ones Satan is suggesting that you live by.

2. Have you established God's Word as the standard for all of your decision-making? Why or why not?

3. What is the greatest area of temptation in your life? Can you claim a passage of Scripture to overcome this temptation? If you cannot locate a Scripture ask your teacher to assist you in finding one that meets your need.

4. If you have not already, will you be willing to make a commitment to live by the Word of God? If so, write your commitment to God below.

Congratulations! Your commitment to live by the Word of God will give you the conviction needed to overcome Satan's temptation. With the Word of God as your foundation, prayer will now become your very lifeline for living life.

Week 1
SEEKING GOD

Action Steps

It is obvious that Jesus knew God's Word, and we too must know God's Word. Commit today to begin to memorize Scripture. Start with the following verses:

James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

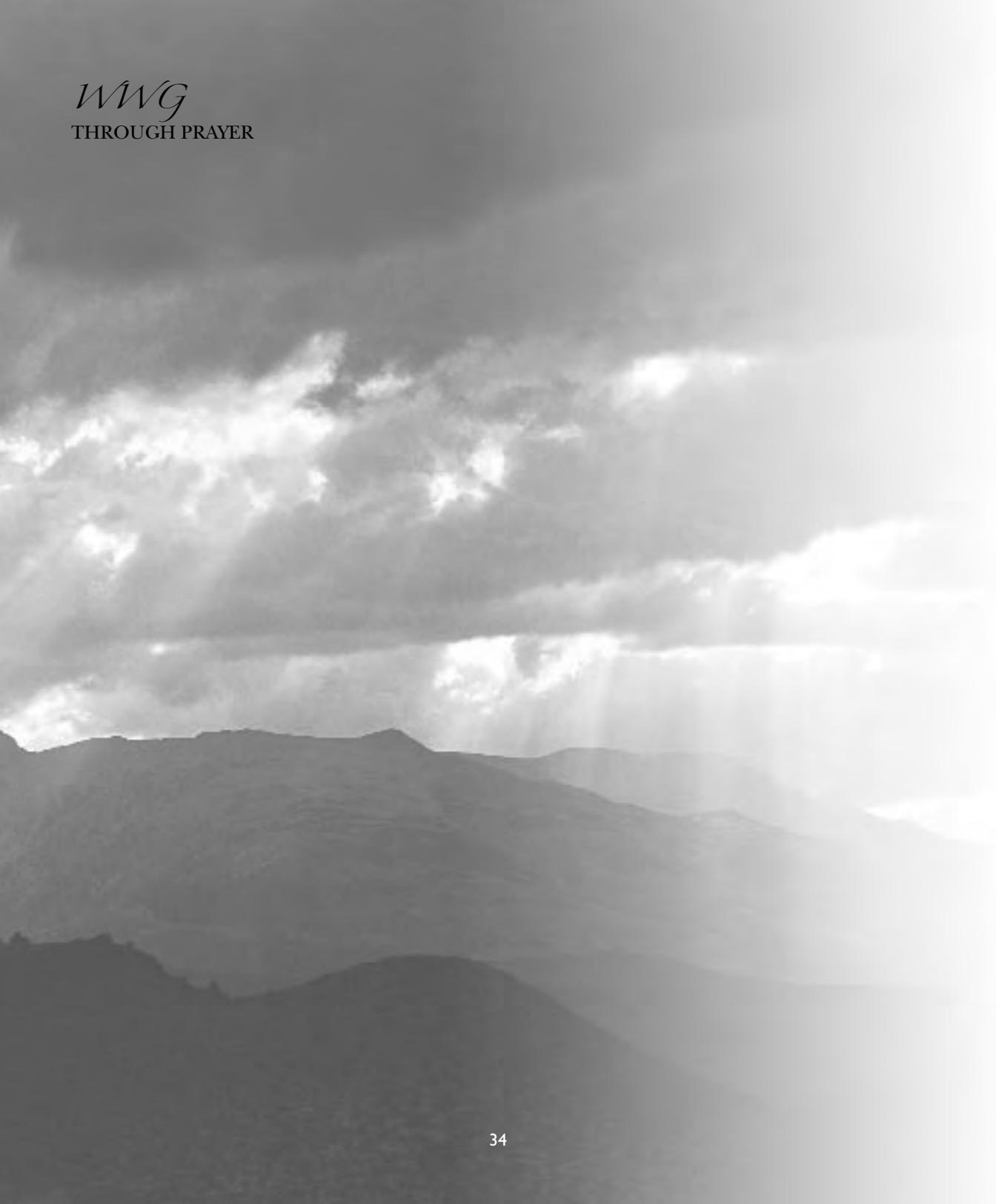
Psalm 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Prayer For The Day

During your time of prayer, ask God to give you a desire to KNOW, UNDERSTAND, and APPLY His Word. Ask Him to establish Godly convictions in every area of your life.

Pour out your heart to Him and let Him set you free to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

WWG
THROUGH PRAYER



Day 1

Praying With Honesty

While week one dealt with our **need** to seek God in prayer, week two addresses how we are to **share** with God. This week is important because we don't want to talk to God irreverently or ineffectively.

Today's study focuses on the importance of praying with honesty. If we fail to be honest with God, our prayer life will never develop. Praying that connects with God is always honest, and honesty is not something innate; it must be developed by careful training.

One day while shopping at Wal-Mart with my two girls, I indirectly experienced the consequences of dishonesty. I decided that we would go to the camping section and look around. I had one-year-old Elizabeth and three-year-old Hannah in the basket. Hannah wanted to walk, so I told her she could walk if she didn't touch anything (What was I thinking!). As we walked along I asked Hannah, "Are you touching anything?" She replied, "No." Moments after turning around to check on Elizabeth, Hannah began to scream. Turning around, I saw Hannah holding her hands over her eyes and crying, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" Through the tears and crying, I finally figured out that she had sprayed Deep Woods Off® into her eyes. I rushed to the bathroom and washed her eyes out with water. Her eyes were okay, but I learned that day that Hannah was okay with her dishonesty until it caused her pain.

The same is true for many adults today. We don't mind being dishonest about our sin until it causes us pain. People don't mind cheating on their mates until they are caught. People don't mind speeding until they crash. The point is, we must not wait for the consequences of sin to direct us back to God. We must be honest with God today about the condition of our hearts.

To pray with honesty, we must come clean with God in every area of our lives and stay clean. Being clean with God means dealing with both public sins and private sins. There are many types of sin, but all sin separates us from God. Isaiah 59:2 says, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

Whether your sin is murmuring or murder, it must be confessed to God. Satan’s goal is for Christians to trivialize sin so that we don’t feel the need to deal specifically with our sins. When this happens, we began to call our sins bad habits, a phase, a tradition, a shortcoming, a white lie, a character flaw, mid-life crisis, a right, or even a reward. These cultural justifications are Satan’s way of keeping us in bondage to sin.

When we confess our sins, turn away from our sins, and trust in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for our sins, then we become children of God. Salvation sets us free from the bondage of sin. Once we become children of God we cannot return to sin without departing from our fellowship with God, for sin breaks fellowship with God. The only way to repair the broken fellowship is to confess our sins, receive God’s forgiveness and move forward.

To see our need for confession, we must first understand that our **sin is against God**. Fill in the following scriptures and then answer the following questions:

Gen. 13:13 *Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly*

_____ .

Gen. 39:9 *No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and _____ ?*

Psalm 51:4 *Against _____, you only, have _____ and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.*

Daniel 9:8 O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have _____ .

Luke 15:18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, _____ have _____ against heaven and _____ .

Acts 5:4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing?

You have not lied to men _____ .

Question #1 Have you viewed the consequences of sin as a personal discomfort or as pain in the heart of God (Genesis 6:5,6)?

Question #2 Jesus' body was broken and He shed His blood for you. How does this affect your life each day in the choices that you make (Galatians 2:20)?

Week 2
SHARING WITH GOD

SIN IS
AGAINST
GOD

Remember, personal purity keeps us in fellowship with God. It is not our abilities, heritage, or influence that connects us to God. God is looking for people of purity through whom He can work to accomplish His will. God must purify us before He can empower us to accomplish His will.

Action Steps

- Ask God to help you make a list of sins that are disrupting your fellowship with Him (Read Ephesians 4:22-32; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24).
- Seek to right any wrongs that you have committed toward others. Write down the action steps you need to take to right your wrongs:

Matthew 6:14-15 “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

- Surrender every area of your life to God.

1 Peter 5:6 “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

Prayer For The Day

Dear Lord, I see my sin is against you and that my sin hurts you. Convict me of sin and teach me to confess my sin quickly. Purify my heart and make me usable as your witness.

Day 2

Week 2

SHARING WITH GOD

Praying With Humility

Today's study focuses on the importance of praying with humility. Humility comes when we see God for who He is. Seeing God as Holy allows us to see that we are sinners in need of Him. If we don't see God in His holiness, we will exalt ourselves in pride. Pride says, "I can handle life without God's help."

Let's look at an example of humility and an example of pride.

Humility:

In Luke 5:1-11, we find Peter kneeling before Jesus humbly confessing his sins in front of everyone. Read the text and answer the following questions:

1. What caused Peter to humble himself before Jesus?

2. How did Peter view Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish?

Pride:

In Jeremiah 13:1-11 we find Jeremiah receiving a message to proclaim to God's people. Read the text and answer the following questions:

1. About what sin is God upset?

2. How does pride impact communication (prayer) with God (vs 10)?

Relationship with God is established and developed through humility. Let's think about how we gave our lives to Christ. First, we saw our need for God, which caused us to humble ourselves before God. Second, in this humble state we confessed our sin and surrendered our lives to God. Now this is praying with humility.

Let me illustrate this point with a real story:

One summer afternoon, Michelle and I decided to go into town to do some shopping. On the way home from shopping, we stopped for some gas. After pumping the gas I noticed two men sitting in a truck. The men looked familiar. One of the men had just purchased a large carton of beer and quickly concealed his purchase when I walked up. God impressed on my heart to witness to the two men immediately, and I did. Neither man said much; they both seemed a little uneasy and soon left. Michelle and I decided to continue consistently in prayer for these men.

A number of weeks went by and one Sunday morning one of the men and his wife showed up at our church. We briefly talked and the man indicated that he and his wife needed prayer. I assured the couple that I would pray for them and would be glad to help in any way that I could.

A few weeks went by and we did not see or hear from this couple. Then, unexpectedly one day, we heard a knock at the door. Michelle opened the door, and standing there was the man's wife who had requested prayer. Michelle invited her in and we all sat down at the table.

Week 2
SHARING WITH GOD

The woman began to cry and pour her heart out to God. She said her passion in life was to smoke pot and stay high as often as she could. She knew her marriage was in trouble and her life was a mess. She confessed that her favorite pastime was to smoke pot on her front porch while rocking in the rocking chair. Drugs had left her feeling hopeless. She said she was ready to humble herself before God and turn away from her life of sin.

With her head bowed and tears flowing down her face, she prayed with humility, confessing all and receiving forgiveness for all. Her prayer that day was simple, truthful, and it came from a humble heart. Therefore, at that very moment, God was able to help this young lady be set free.

Today Wes and Susan are faithful servants of God and enjoy the blessing of a Christian marriage. They pray daily and witness to all who will listen to their testimony about how God changed their lives.

All believers establish their relationship with God in a state of humility. Now the probing question for a Christian today is: "Are you continuing your relationship with God in a state of humility?" Are you praying with humility or with pride?

Do you see your need for God or are you still living with pride, snubbing your nose at prayer? To help answer these questions read Luke 18:9-14. This passage communicates clearly the importance of praying with humility. In this passage Jesus tells the parable of two men going to the temple to pray. One man is a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee prayed haughtily about himself while the tax collector prayed honestly for himself. After evaluating the passage answer the following questions:

1. How did the Pharisee view himself and how did he view God?

2. How did the Tax Collector view himself and how did he view God?

God would not help the Pharisee because he did not see his need for help. The Pharisee wanted to impress God by saying, “Look at how I serve you God; aren’t you lucky to have me.” But man’s pride in himself never impresses God. No matter how many times we have prayed, we should always come before God in a state of unworthiness (humility).

We must first see our need for God if we are to pray reverently and effectively. The tax collector shows us that we should approach God as sinners in need of His mercy.

We pray with humility in order to be saved. We must continue to pray with that same humility throughout our Christian lives.

Prayer For The Day

Read the following scripture and write a prayer to God:

James 4:7-10 “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.**”

Prayer:

Day 3

Week 2

SHARING WITH GOD

Praying With Faith

I have a son named Joshua. He is seven years old, and I love him with all my heart. Joshua thinks his daddy can fix anything, lift everything, and do anything. Wow! It is amazing how children can encourage you and give you purpose. Of course, I am far from the master of everything that Joshua thinks I am. However, since Joshua believes I can do anything, he places a great deal of trust in everything I say. If I tell Joshua that something is going to be ok and work out, he believes me.

Recently, while visiting a beautiful hotel in the mountains of north Georgia, I broke that trust by accident. As we entered the hotel we began to admire the grand lobby, quaint restaurant, and beautiful views. Joshua went up the stairs to see the upper floors and higher views of the mountains. I followed, and we viewed the mountains together from the upper floor. As we turned to leave, Joshua asked if he could ride the elevator down by himself. I said yes and instructed him on which buttons to push. As the elevator door closed, I rushed down the stairs to beat the elevator. I wanted to be waiting on Joshua when the doors opened. In the lobby I waited for the door to open. As the doors opened, my heart sunk, no one was on the elevator. Many things run through your mind when you are separated from your child. After thinking a moment, I realized that I had instructed him to push the wrong button; he was headed to the basement not the lobby.

I raced down the stairs to the basement. In a large open room, I searched for the elevator. Standing directly below the lobby I thought, "This has to be where the elevator would be." Confused and wondering what had happened, I stood still and began praying. While praying, I heard a whimpering sound. Down the hall and around the corner I found Joshua wandering around in the maintenance area of the hotel. He was scared and unsure about where to go. We quickly embraced and Joshua looked at me and said, "Why did you do that to me Daddy, where did you go?" I held him tight and said, "I am so sorry, I told you to push the wrong button." The elevator had gone to the bottom floor and the rear door of the elevator had opened into the basement instead of the lobby.

By faith Joshua got on the elevator and followed my instructions. I made an honest mistake and Joshua learned that his daddy is human. However, we have a heavenly Father that does not make mistakes. In confidence we can get on the elevator of life, push the button, and trust by faith that God will take care of us according to His will. When we do, we will be praying with faith. Unlike me, God never gives us the wrong instructions. We may not always like where His elevator takes us, but He never makes a mistake about our destination.

To further understand what it means to pray with faith, lets evaluate Luke 7:1-10. In this passage, we find a Roman centurion who looks to Jesus to heal his sick servant. The point in this passage is not the end result of the servants healing, but the centurion's willingness to look to God, lean on God, and let God work in his life.

Faith praying is a declaration of dependence on doing things God's way rather than our own. When we pray with faith, we are declaring that God knows best and is capable of handling every concern we have in life.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Surety and certainty are needed confidences for all Christians. The centurion was a man who was sure and certain that Jesus was capable of handling his trying circumstance. In fact, the soldier's faith was so sure and so certain that he amazed Jesus with his faith. Jesus was so moved by the man's faith he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Wow! Jesus was impressed.

What was it about this soldier's faith that so impressed Jesus? How can we amaze Jesus with great faith? How can we make a declaration of dependence on God in the circumstances of our lives? To answer these questions we must see how the soldier approached Jesus and accepted Jesus' authority.

APPROACHING JESUS

First, the centurion approaches Jesus through prayer. Through a delegation of friends the centurion is "asking" Jesus to come. It should be noted that the Jewish delegation emphasized the centurion's love and labor as the reason why Jesus should answer the request. Interestingly, Jesus does not acknowledge the man's works but does acknowledge his great faith.

The love and labor were not the leverage that led Jesus to respond. Jesus does not answer our prayers based on a system of accounting that tracks our good works. The centurion's love and labor were fruits of faith. Jesus never acknowledged the man's great love and labor. No! It was the man's faith that was great. Great faith always leads to identifiable fruit. The point is that the centurion had both genuine love and genuine works because he had "great faith."

Week 2

SHARING WITH GOD

It can be understood as follows:

1. We pray because we believe by faith that God is listening.
2. When we believe by faith, we act by faith to trust God.
3. When we act by faith we produce actions that reveal we are trusting God.
4. Then the results of these actions (fruit) reveal our faith.

Faith praying does not try to leverage position with Jesus. Instead it realizes that we are undeserving and unworthy to approach Jesus. Luke 7: 6b-7 the centurion says, "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you." His friends had declared in verse 4, "This man deserves to have you do this." Praying in faith does not beckon God presumptuously to get with the program and answer our request because He owes us. No, praying with faith, we approach God with the realization that we are undeserving and unworthy of asking.

ACCEPTING JESUS' AUTHORITY

Secondly, the centurion's acceptance of Jesus' authority is outstanding. He says, "But say the word, and my servant will be healed." There is no lack of faith in these words. Doubt is not present in this man's heart. There is a trust and confidence that realizes Jesus is capable and has the authority.

The centurion was able to place his confidence in Jesus because he first placed himself under Jesus. Authority was not a new principle for the soldier. He was under authority, and he exercised authority in his military life. Thus, in his spiritual life he knew the importance of submitting to Jesus' authority. Until we get under Jesus, we will never understand how to pray with faith. Truth and faith are fused together when we in humility fall under God's authority. Praying with faith is praying in submission to God's

will. It is coming to the point we can say, “Not my will, Father, but yours be done.” Jesus was amazed with the willing submission that came from the soldiers heart as he came under Jesus’ authority.

Now let me pose a few questions that will help us determine if we are praying with faith:

1. Do you believe you can trust Jesus with every issue of life?
2. When was the last time you expected God to answer your prayers because of something you had done for Him?
3. Will you continue to serve God even if His will is different than your request?
4. Can you surrender your will and authority to His will and authority?

Action Steps

1. Commit to trust God with every issue of your life.
2. Come to Jesus in humility.
3. Choose to place yourself under God's authority.
4. Continue to serve God through every circumstance of life.

Prayer For The Day

God, I commit to trust you with every aspect of my life. Thank you that while in my own merit I am undeserving and unworthy, in you I can do all things. Make me a person of great faith by teaching me to approach you humbly and to surrender fully under your authority. Help me to think of the centurion when I begin to force "my way" or try to prove my spiritual merit in any situation. Make my life a testimony of surrender and humility to you. Amen.

Week 2

SHARING WITH GOD

Day 4

Praying With Consistency

In order to play golf, there are a number of things you must do before hitting the ball off the first tee. Normally, you will first find a playing partner. Then you will call the clubhouse and get a tee time. Next, you gather your equipment and drive to the course. Then you go to the clubhouse, sign in, get your cart, and strap your clubs to the cart. You drive to the practice green and take a few practice putts and chips. Finally, your tee time arrives and you get your best driver out and walk to the tee box. You carefully place your ball on the tee and line up your shot. After a few warm up swings, you step up to the ball and swing away. If all goes well, you connect a solid hit on the face of the club and the ball soars out of sight. Now, could you imagine turning to your golf partner and saying, “That’s all the golf I want to play today. I will see you later. You can find my ball and play it if you want; I’m going home.” No one would ever consider you a golfer if that were your attitude and approach to golf.

The same is true in prayer. Too often, we pray to God and never watch to see what the answer will be. Would you stop your golf game at the first tee? No! Would you go to all the hard work of planting a garden and never watch it grow or pick the vegetables that it produced? No! Then why are we prone to plant our prayers before God and never watch for an answer? I believe it is because we fail to understand that prayer is walking throughout life with God. God does not want us to treat Him like a vending machine where we walk up, put our money in, and get our desired product. Satan wants us to think prayer works this way, but it doesn’t.

Satan loves to come along and whisper in our ears that prayer does not work. Here is what he will say: “I tried to tell you that prayer does not change anything. Now look; has God answered your prayer yet? You have prayed many times and God still has not given you an answer. Don’t waste your time praying because prayer does not change a thing.” Samuel Chadwick wrote, “The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from

Week 2

SHARING WITH GOD

prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”¹ As you begin to seek God and share with God in prayer, you will be tempted to give up and miss experiencing the answers in prayer that God desires to give you.

In Luke 11:5-13 Jesus teaches us that we must ask, seek, and knock in our praying. These three elements of prayer are very important if we are to be involved with God in the process of seeing our prayers answered. God does not want us to pray and walk away; he wants us to be actively involved in fulfilling His will. In Luke 11:2-4, Jesus had just finished sharing The Lord’s Prayer with the disciples. Jesus was communicating that the model prayer was not to be turned into a religious ritual. We must see that prayer is progressive, not idle. Progressive prayer seeks to understand God’s will, submit to God’s will, and fulfill God’s will. This process of bringing our will into submission to God’s will is accomplished by continually coming boldly to God through prayer.

Luke 11:8 says, *“I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s _____ he will get up and give him as much as he needs.”*

Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!

(Psalm 27:14 NKJV)

It is our boldness before God that keeps us walking with God in prayer. This boldness is not arrogance but consistency. To ask, seek, and knock is the definition of Biblical boldness. These three words in the original Greek language are understood as follows:

Ask = keep on asking

Seek = keep on seeking

Knock = keep on knocking

These words are active not idle. We could write them like this:

Continue to - **A**sk and it will be given to you.

Continue to - **S**eek and you will find.

Continue to - **K**nock and it will be opened to you.

The purpose of continuing to ask, seek, and knock is not to wear God down until He comes around to our point of view, but to continue to walk with God in prayer until God's will is accomplished. God always answers prayer according to His will (1 John 5:14). When you continue with God in prayer, it means you are willing to finish the round of golf; you are willing to pick the vegetables.

E.M. Bounds wrote, "I think Christians fail so often to get answers to their prayers because they do not wait long enough on God. They just drop down and say a few words, and then jump up and forget it and expect God to answer them. Such praying always reminds me of the small boy ringing his neighbor's doorbell and then running away as fast as he can go."² Let's make a commitment today that we will not ring God's doorbell (with prayer) and then run away. Instead, we must enter God's open door and walk with God until He answers our prayers according to His will.

Action Steps

Use the following prayer journal outline to record your prayer requests that are in process. Use this reproducible outline to start a prayer journal in a notebook or on your computer. If a journal is not appealing to you, then write your prayer requests on a sheet of paper and place them in your Bible. The important thing is to write them down.

Week 2

SHARING WITH GOD

Prayer For The Day

Lord, forgive me for asking of you but not walking with you through the process of prayer. Open my eyes so that I can see how you are answering my prayers. Give me the Biblical boldness to continue to seek your will until your answer comes.

List below the prayer requests that you need to daily seek the Lord about:

Prayer Updates

Date: 2/1

Update:

Thank you God for
controlling my words
today. I pray that my
co-workers will see
their need for you.

Use me to share with
them when the time is
right.

Date: _____

Update:

Date: _____

Update:

Date: _____

Update:

Example

Prayer Journal Entry

Starting Date: 1/1

Prayer Request:

 God please help me with the words I speak.

Scripture To Apply To The Request:

 Psalm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my

heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Changes I Need To Make:

 Listen more than I speak. Filter the words I hear through

PS 19:14 before reply.

Verse To Memorize and Meditate On:

 James 1:19, Psalm 19:14

Ending Date: _____

(Fill this line in when your request is answered)

Prayer Journal Entry

Prayer Updates

Starting Date: _____

Date: _____

Prayer Request:

Update:



Scripture To Apply To The Request:

Date: _____



Update:

Changes I Need To Make:

Date: _____



Update:

Verse To Memorize and Meditate On:



Date: _____

Update:

Ending Date: _____

(Fill this line in when your request is answered)

Day 5

Praying With Certainty

*Then you shall call, and
the LORD will answer;
You shall cry, and He will
say, 'Here I am.'*

(Isaiah 58:9a NKJV)

In the last day we talked about God opening the door when we pray with Biblical boldness. Biblical boldness means to ask, seek, and knock. You may be thinking to yourself, when I do ask, seek, and knock, how can I be certain that God will hear my prayers and answer me?

We can know with certainty that God will hear and answer our prayers when we understand that God wants the best for us. God is not going to hold back the best from us or harm us in any way. In Luke 11:5-13 Jesus is arguing from the negative to the positive to show that God is waiting to answer our prayers. Take a few minutes and read this passage.

In this passage, the man who refused to meet the needs of his friend is the negative example. He negatively exclaimed that the door was locked, his family was in bed, and that he would not help.

The positive example is that God is not locked behind a closed door refusing to help. No, He is waiting and willing to help. Yes we are to pray consistently, but we are not praying to a God who sits behind a closed door, or to a God who would try to trick or harm us.

To clarify this last point, Jesus asked in verses 11-12, “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?” (Of course loving parents would not intentionally try to harm or trick their children.)

Therefore, Jesus replies in verse 13, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, HOW MUCH MORE will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Jesus is pleading with us to trust him with our lives. Are we as Christians today really looking to God for guidance and purpose in our lives? I’m afraid not; many live from event to event or relationship to relationship searching for purpose. Human events and relationships may entertain us for a time, but they cannot fulfill us. When will we wake up and see that God loves us and is willing to meet our needs? God is waiting; will we call to Him in prayer?

Week 2

SHARING WITH GOD

While in Texas attending Seminary, God divinely brought Michelle into my life. I knew from the first night I met her that she would be my wife. We dated for several months before I took her home to Virginia to meet my family. During our visit to Virginia, I asked Michelle to marry me. We were engaged and began to plan our wedding for June. We left Virginia and started back for Texas, staying with relatives along the way.

During our time in the car, we continued to discuss and pray about the future. We had been feeling that God would need to provide a ministry opportunity closer to the Seminary so that I could complete my degree. I had taken all the classes that could be taken on Tuesday and Thursday. Now I needed to take the classes offered on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Realizing this fact, I had typed up my resumé so that I would be prepared to distribute it when God was ready.

Traveling through Louisiana at around 2:30 in the afternoon we decided to stop and eat some lunch. We pulled off the interstate in Ruston, Louisiana. On the right side of the highway there was a place to get a salad but on the left side a sign indicated that there was a Pizza Hut. After a brief discussion, we decided to find the Pizza Hut so that we could get salad and pizza. After numerous turns and a trip down a one-way street the wrong way, we pulled into the Pizza Hut.

The place was completely deserted except for one family seated over in the corner. We ordered and began to observe the family in the corner. Michelle noticed the man was wearing a multicolored bead bracelet that looked like a witnessing bracelet. We wondered if he was a Christian wearing a witnessing bracelet. We ate our food and headed to the front of the restaurant. I slipped into the restroom while Michelle went to the register to pay. When I came out she was talking with the man who was wearing the bracelet. Through their conversation, each shared that they were Christians. I stepped forward and introduced myself.

We began to talk and here are the facts that we learned. We were both headed back to Texas. We both decided to stop at a deserted Pizza Hut to eat at 2:30 in the afternoon. We both were attending the same seminary in Ft. Worth. We both were in ministry; he was a pastor, and I was a youth pastor. John shared that he was looking to hire a youth minister, and I shared that I was open to moving to a new youth ministry position. Before this happened, no one knew of my openness to move except Michelle and God.

Prayer For The Day

Week 2

SHARING WITH GOD

Dear Lord forgive me for praying in half-hearted belief. Forgive me for not being convinced that you care about and hear every detail that I come to you with in prayer. Lord I believe, help me overcome my unbelief. Search my heart and bring to mind all the baggage, burdens and people that I have tried to take on myself. Put conviction in my heart to be convinced that you want me to pray about every detail of my life. May I begin today to not only pray with conviction, but may I also begin to watch you divinely work around me. Give me opportunities today to divinely encounter those who are lost without you. Help me speak in your love and boldness because I am convinced that you are going to use my life as your witness. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

¹ E.M. Bounds, *A Treasury of Prayer*, Comp. Leonard Ravenhill (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1961), 186.

² E.M. Bounds, *A Treasury of Prayer*, Comp. Leonard Ravenhill (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1961), 70-71.

WWG
THROUGH PRAYER



Week 3 — SEARCHING GOD'S WORD

Week 3 SEARCHING GOD'S WORD

Day 1

Letting God Speak

When we need direction in our lives, we should pray. A part of prayer is telling God our concerns, but it is only part of the prayer process. Once we have told God our concerns, we need to listen for God's answers. When God answers, we must be willing to accept the truth God gives us.

If we share our concerns without any intention of allowing God to speak, then we are missing the purpose of prayer. Prayer is a two-way communication with God not a microphone approach of beckoning God to meet our needs. All two-way communication involves listening. Are we listening for God to answer?

We may be tempted to presume that God will immediately answer every time we pray. God does answer all our prayers, if we listen. But the answer may be yes, no, or wait.

“No” and “wait” involve more surrender and more seeking. This takes perseverance. We must be willing to persevere and listen for God to speak. If we are not willing to wait and listen for God to speak, we will misunderstand how God is working in our lives. Be assured that there are no short cuts that make one prayer more effective than another. Prayer is a process of listening and learning, and this process teaches us about God. Consider the following example of this principle. As you read the example, remember that prayer helps us understand God and His will for our lives.

*Be still and know
that I am God.*

(Psalm 46:10a)

Example – Learning Is A Process

A couple of students figured out how to pass math class with straight A's. Each day near the end of the class period, the teacher would assign math problems to work on before the class ended. During this time-period, the teacher often stepped out of the class for a short break. One day, as the teacher stepped out for a break, the students carried out their plan. One boy boldly walked to the front of the class and picked up the extra copy of the teacher's book containing all the answers. He quickly handed the book to a student on the front row. Then the book was passed from one student to another until it reached a student on the back row. He threw the book out the window into the bushes below. When class ended, the students quickly retrieved the book. From that point on, math class was a breeze.

As the semester went along, the students heralded themselves as heroes for deceiving the teacher. The teacher never figured out what happened to the extra book. However, the heroes soon became zeros when the semester test was issued. Each person who used the teacher's book during the semester struggled to pass the exam.

Math is a process of learning that builds from the simple to the complex. Because these students wanted quick answers without the process, they never grew to understand math. The same is true with learning to understand God. We can't always expect quick answers. We must grow and learn as God speaks to us through His Word. We can't steal the answers from God and expect to understand His will for our lives. We must learn to patiently wait for God's answers to our prayers, realizing that along the way we are learning important faith building principles. It is vital that we learn how to listen to God. Following is a brief testimony of George Mueller and the principles that guided him in listening to God.

Testimony – George Mueller (nineteenth century)

George Mueller was a pastor in England who demonstrated great faith in listening to and obeying God. He had a great desire for the voice of God to guide his every step. George would pray for ministry needs and tell no one of his desires. He longed to see God provide and move in such a way that only God could receive the credit.

During his life, Muller saw God work through him to build four orphanages that housed two thousand children. God also allowed him to distribute over eight million dollars for ministry causes. Through prayer, God guided and equipped George Mueller to accomplish what many considered impossible. How did he do it? Here are the steps George followed to hear God speak:¹

1. I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the trouble with people generally is just here. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the knowledge of what His will is.
2. Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If so, I make myself liable to great delusions.
3. I seek the Will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Spirit guides us at all, He will do it according to the scriptures and never contrary to them.
4. Next, I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God's Will in connection with His Word and Spirit.
5. I ask God in prayer to reveal His Will to me aright.
6. Thus, (1) through prayer to God, (2) the study of the Word, and (3) reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge; and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly.

Week 3

SEARCHING GOD'S WORD

*"I waited patiently for the
Lord; he turned to me and
heard my cry."*

(Psalm 40:1)

Action Steps

To hear God speak we must surrender our lives, seek Him in the Word of God, and survey our lives to discern how God is working. Answer the following questions to prepare your heart to hear God speak:

SURRENDER your will to God:

1. Are you praying with the intention of learning God's will or are you whining about your problems?

2. Is your motive in praying to manipulate God to grant your wants, or to say, "Not my will but yours be done."

SEEK God in the Word:

1. Do you really want God's advice on how to live?

2. Do you take time to read His Word and apply it to your life?

SURVEY where God is working:

1. Can you identify a prayer that God has answered in the past year?

2. Who has God brought into your life that needs prayer?

Prayer For The Day

Father, I need direction from you for my life today. Without you, I can do nothing. Do not allow my perspective to blur your will. By your Word, lead me today. Give me truth to live by today. By faith, I trust your way is the only way. Help me to learn to patiently wait for your voice and your answers to my requests.

Week 3

SEARCHING
GOD'S WORD

*"I waited patiently for the
Lord; he turned to me and
heard my cry."*

(Psalm 40:1)

Day 2

Listening With Obedience

"For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous."

(Romans 2:13)

The goal of today's study is to emphasize the crucial importance of obeying God's Word. How often do we read the Bible in haste without any intention of obeying what we have learned? To know what is right and choose not to obey is a formula for disaster. We must listen with a goal of obedience if we are going to pray effectively.

God has blessed our family with three wonderful children. As their father, I am responsible to give them instructions where needed. For example, there are those nights at bedtime that I give them specific instructions on getting ready for bed. Calling the kids together I say, "It is time for bed. This means that you need to get your bedtime clothes on and brush your teeth. Do you understand?" They nod their cute heads while saying, "Yes, we understand."

"You have ten minutes. Do you understand?"

"Yes, we understand."

There are those times when I return ten minutes later and find three children who are dressed the same as before my instructions with no trace of brushed teeth. I ask, "What happened?"

They claim, "We forgot."

The truth is they did not forget to put their bedtime clothes on and brush their teeth; they chose not to remember.

How often do we choose not to remember the truth God reveals? To glance at truth or lend an ear for a few minutes with no real intention of acting upon what we see or hear is dangerous. James 1:22 says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." Believe it or not, this is a command we are called to obey.

To obey James 1:22, we need to realize that we have a choice to make. According to James 1:21-25, we can either accept God's Word or we can reject God's Word. Let's look at the consequence of forgetting God's Word compared to the benefit of obeying God's Word.

The Consequence Of Disobedience

Exposure to God's Word followed by willful forgetfulness leads to being deceived. Verse 22 says it this way, "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves." This is self-deception. Self-deception means to cheat or deceive by false reasoning. In other words, we rationalize that the Word of God is not needed. It is like a man who cheats on his wife and leaves his family for another woman. Such a man falsely convinces himself that to leave his family will be best for everyone. This type of reasoning is self-deception by way of false reasoning. Are you deceiving yourself in any area of your life?

To ignore the Word of God by merely listening is to walk away from the presence of God and the power of God to overcome sin in our lives. Verse 21 says, "...get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you." To know the truth and not allow the truth to change us is to refuse to let the Word of God cleanse our sin. Verse 23 describes it as, "...a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." This type of willful spiritual amnesia shifts us from fellowship with God to rebellion against God. Are you rejecting God's Word in any area of your life?

The Benefits Of Obedience

Rejecting God's Word keeps us from receiving God's best for our lives. On the other hand, our relationship with God grows when we listen to God with a desire to obey. According to verse 25, we are to "look intently" into the Word of God. To "look intently" means to stoop down in order to get a closer look. Stooping takes time and energy. When my kids slide a toy under the refrigerator, I have to get down on the floor to look under the refrigerator to determine where the toy is. God is saying for us to get down

Week 3 SEARCHING GOD'S WORD

²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror

²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

(James 1:22-25)

"God will never reveal more truth about Himself until you have obeyed what you know already!"

Oswald Chambers
(My Utmost for
His Highest p. 30)

WWG

THROUGH PRAYER

into the Word and look at it closely. After looking intently, then we should continue looking again, and again. This means we are to abide in the Word (John 15:5).

“Get into the habit of saying, ‘Speak, Lord,’ and life will become a romance. Every time circumstances press, say, ‘Speak, Lord’; make time to listen.”

Oswald Chambers
(My Utmost for
His Highest p. 30)

¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁶For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

(1 John 2:15-17)

Now, the true test is upon us. After looking continually and intently into God’s Word, we must not forget what we have heard; instead, we must take action upon the truth God has revealed to us. We take action upon God’s Word when we choose to do it.

When we act on God’s Word by doing it, we reap an incredible benefit. James 1:25 says that the obedient Christian, “...will be blessed in what he does.” To listen obediently to God through His Word will lead us down a road of blessing rather than a road of remorse and regret. Are you walking in blessed obedience to God’s Word?

Action Steps To Take:

Read 1 John 2:15-17. Now that you have read this passage, apply the principles of James 1:25 to the passage (look intently, look continually, and don’t forget). To record what God is saying in this passage, use the Scripture Study form on the next page. The form is designed to help you discover the meaning of the passage.

Example
Scripture Study

Scripture Verse/Passage: _____

Identify Key Words/Phrases: _____

Investigate The Meaning:

Context: Read the verses above and below the text you are studying.

Then consider the following contextual areas:

Circumstances: Is the text dealing with specific/unique circumstances?

Culture: Are there traditions or cultural dynamics that need to be considered?

Geography: Identify geographical aspects that impact the meaning of the text.

Cross References: Compare Scripture with Scripture. Other verses can clarify and support the text you are studying. Use the cross reference column (if your Bible provides one) or concordance in your Bible to assist in locating other applicable verses.

Commentary: After a thorough examination of the text, consult a good commentary for further insights. Your Bible may provide notes underneath the text that will be helpful (ask your Bible teacher or pastor to recommend a good commentary).

Instruction To Receive:

Examples To Follow: Can you identify a person who is living God's truth?

Promises To Claim: Does the passage contain a promise from God?

Commands To Obey: Does the passage contain a command from God?

Warnings To Heed: Does the text issue a warning?

Conditions To Meet: Does the passage call for certain conditions to be met?

Impact On My Life:

How Does This Change My Life? How should these truths change your life?

Sin To Confess: Turn away from any sin that you see in your life.

Action Steps To Take: Live the truth you have received from God.

Scripture Study

Scripture Verse/Passage: _____

Identify Key Words/Phrases: _____

Investigate The Meaning:

Context: _____

Circumstances: _____

Culture: _____

Geography: _____

Cross References: _____

Commentary: _____

Instruction To Receive:

Examples To Follow: _____

Promises To Claim: _____

Commands To Obey: _____

Warnings To Heed: _____

Conditions To Meet: _____

Impact On My Life:

How Does This Change My Life? _____

Sin To Confess: _____

Action Steps To Take: _____

Day 3

Leaving All Behind

Listening to God and obeying Him are foundational to following God. In day three we will learn that true listening and true obeying are realized when we leave all behind and follow Jesus. Following Jesus is an exciting adventure that will take us down roads of life we logically would not choose. Luke 5:1-11 records the story of a fisherman named Peter who encountered the call of Jesus to leave everything behind. Peter's obedience sets an example that Christians should follow as they hear God speak to them. As you study Peter's story, evaluate your own life. Have you answered God's call? Have you surrendered all? Are you fishing for men?

Peter Leaves It All Behind

In Luke 5:1-11, we find Jesus preaching the Word of God to a crowd of people and to a group of tired fishermen who are cleaning their nets. It is on this morning that Jesus seeks Peter out to speak a specific word to his heart. Jesus decides to get into Peter's boat and then asks Peter to launch out a little way from the shore. Jesus preaches to the crowd from Peter's boat. He then turns to Peter and asks him to launch out into the deep and let the nets down for a catch.

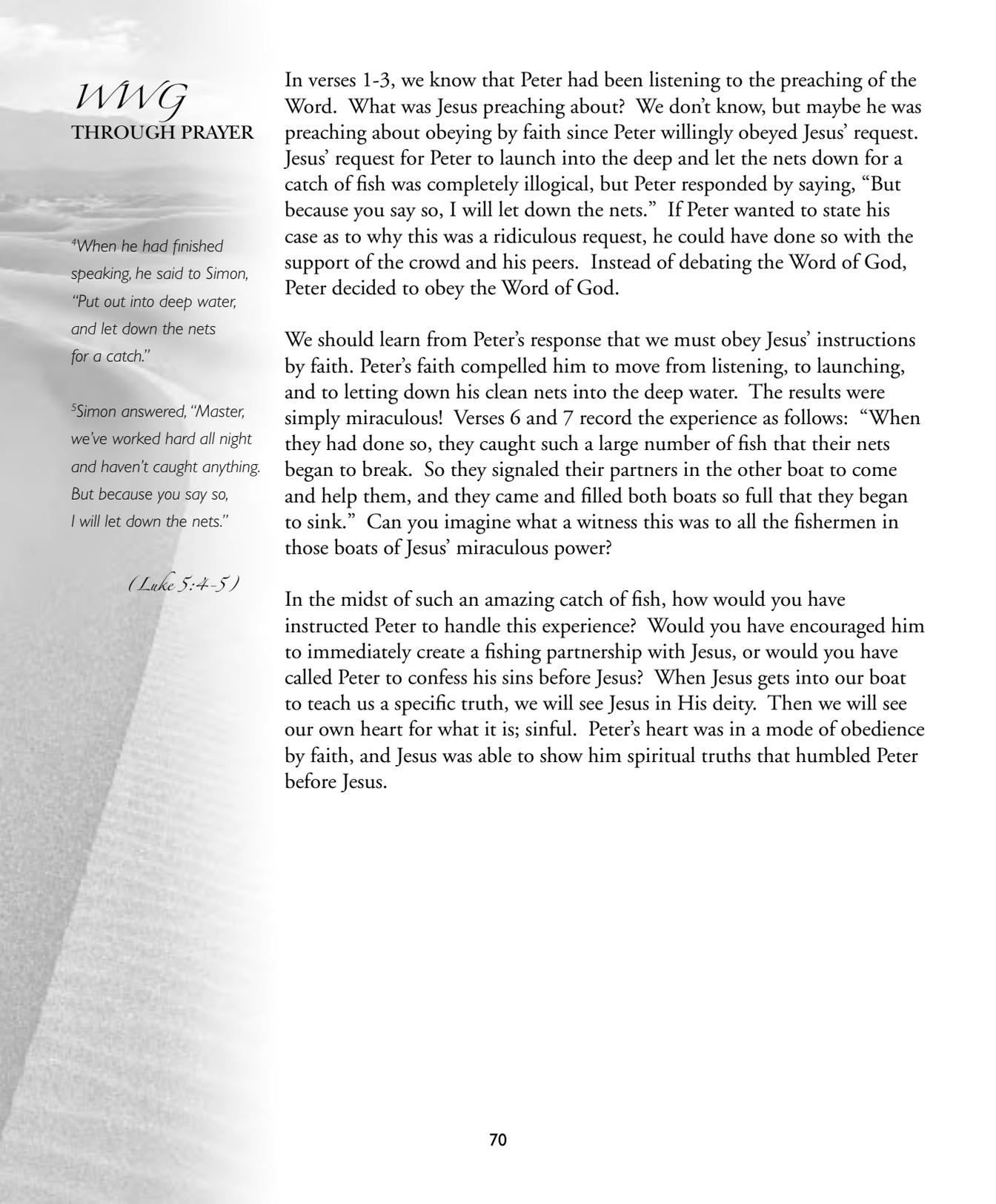
What a strange request, since Peter had fished all night and had caught nothing. What was Jesus up to? Jesus always had a purpose behind every question he asked and every command He gave. Amazingly by faith, Peter, the fisherman, obeys Jesus the carpenter/preacher, and launches out into the deep to catch fish. Surely, Peter's peers thought he was crazy. The nets were clean and the men were weary from fishing all night with no results.

Week 3

SEARCHING
GOD'S WORD

*For whoever desires to
save his life will lose it, but
whoever loses his life for
My sake will save it.*

(Luke 9:24 NKJV)



WWG
THROUGH PRAYER

⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

⁵Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

(Luke 5:4-5)

In verses 1-3, we know that Peter had been listening to the preaching of the Word. What was Jesus preaching about? We don't know, but maybe he was preaching about obeying by faith since Peter willingly obeyed Jesus' request. Jesus' request for Peter to launch into the deep and let the nets down for a catch of fish was completely illogical, but Peter responded by saying, "But because you say so, I will let down the nets." If Peter wanted to state his case as to why this was a ridiculous request, he could have done so with the support of the crowd and his peers. Instead of debating the Word of God, Peter decided to obey the Word of God.

We should learn from Peter's response that we must obey Jesus' instructions by faith. Peter's faith compelled him to move from listening, to launching, and to letting down his clean nets into the deep water. The results were simply miraculous! Verses 6 and 7 record the experience as follows: "When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink." Can you imagine what a witness this was to all the fishermen in those boats of Jesus' miraculous power?

In the midst of such an amazing catch of fish, how would you have instructed Peter to handle this experience? Would you have encouraged him to immediately create a fishing partnership with Jesus, or would you have called Peter to confess his sins before Jesus? When Jesus gets into our boat to teach us a specific truth, we will see Jesus in His deity. Then we will see our own heart for what it is; sinful. Peter's heart was in a mode of obedience by faith, and Jesus was able to show him spiritual truths that humbled Peter before Jesus.

In turn, Peter found himself publicly professing his sin filled heart before both strangers and friends. When Jesus grips our hearts with truth, we will see our sinfulness and bow in His presence. Peter clearly saw that Jesus knew more about fishing than he did. Jesus made this point about fishing so that Peter would understand that Jesus knew best in every area of life.

Peter was pleading with Jesus to leave his presence because of his sinful heart, but Jesus was inviting Peter to follow him in the business of catching men, not fish. Prayer that is based on God's Word will always lead us to follow Jesus in the ministry of fishing for men. Peter never anticipated that obedience to Jesus would so radically change his life. The same is true for us. We cannot calculate how God's Word will change our lives when we obey by faith. The one thing we can calculate is that we can do nothing without God (John 15:5). If we refuse to pray with an open heart before the Word of God, we will never become useable for God's glory.

It should be noted that Peter was fearful about this prospect of catching men. Therefore, Jesus told Peter, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." Peter once again accepted the words of Jesus by faith because the text states, "So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him." They left their boats full of fish and went with Jesus.

The missionary Jim Elliot penned the words, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliot then lost his life trying to reach a group of Auca Indians.² That is getting out of the boat, leaving a great catch of fish and following Jesus.

Week 3

SEARCHING GOD'S WORD

*When Simon Peter saw this,
he fell at Jesus' knees and
said, "Go away from me, Lord;
I am a sinful man!"*

(Luke 5:8)

^{10b}*Then Jesus said to Simon,
"Don't be afraid; from now on
you will catch men."*

¹¹*So they pulled their boats
up on shore, left everything
and followed him.*

(Luke 5:10b-11)

Action Steps

How about you, have you let go of all to follow Jesus? Do you have, as Jim Elliot did, a “consuming thirst” to do the will of God rather than your own? Think about what is holding you back. Is it family, friends, success, busyness, failure, money, material possessions, intellect, position? Record honestly what is holding you back.

Prayer For The Day

Read Philippians 3:7-11 and then personalize it as a heart felt prayer. Write your name in each blank.

⁷But whatever was to _____ (‘s) profit
_____ now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

⁸What is more, _____ considers everything
a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing
Christ Jesus _____ Lord, for whose sake
_____ have (has) lost (my comfort, my
reputation, my ideas, my way) all things. I consider them

rubbish, that _____ may gain Christ
and be found in him, not having a righteousness of
_____ (s) own that comes from the law (religion,
activity, background, heritage, knowledge), but that which is
through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from
God and is by faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ (not
committees, positions, sports, power, fame, fortune) and the
power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his
sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so,
somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.
Amen.

Week 3
SEARCHING
GOD'S WORD

Day 4

Letting Jesus Lead

On day three of our prayer study, we learned how Peter came to the realization that Jesus is the Christ. Through the miraculous catch of fish, Peter's spiritual eyes were opened. Jesus issued the call to follow, and Peter willingly left all and followed Christ. Peter's submission was an indication of his willingness to be developed into a "fisher of men" (see Luke. 5:10).

His initial willingness to follow was only the beginning. Peter needed to learn that following Christ is a daily surrender to God's will. In the same way, our prayer life should lead to daily surrender if God is going to guide us through life. Without letting God lead, prayer becomes a struggle instead of a source of strength, a heartache instead of a heart guarded.

Let's identify how prayer can become a struggle in our lives by studying Matthew 16:13-28. Take time to read the passage and consider the points below.

First Truth Revealed – THE CHRIST

In Matthew chapter 16, Jesus is quizzing the disciples to see if they know that He is the Christ. Jesus asks in verse 15, "Who do you say I am?" Then, in verse 16, Peter gets it right and says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replies, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." We cannot overlook that God revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Son of God. This revelation is a clear example that God had been communicating with Peter.

Second Truth Revealed – THE CHURCH

From verse 17 to verse 18, Jesus builds on the truth that He is the Christ by sharing how the Church would be established. In this explanation He shares that Peter will be a part of building the Church. The plan was as follows:

The Foundation = Jesus the rock (Petra = rock).

The Foreman = Jesus (I will build).

The Fight = Victory (the gates of Hades will not prevail).

The Formula = Peter (Petros = small stone) receives the keys.

In reference to building His Church, Jesus revealed that the victory was sure and that Peter would be given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. The keys to the kingdom signified authority to declare what is forbidden or permitted according to heaven. In fact, Christians today can declare what is forbidden or permitted in heaven because we have the Word of God.

When we speak the Word of God, we know that it is the will of God. Our goal is not to get man's will done in heaven but to carry out God's will on earth according to His Word.

When we live by and minister by the Word of God, we have the authority and power to fulfill God's will. Peter heard these truths and probably said, "Amen." However, there was another truth that Peter found hard to take. In fact, the third truth disturbed Peter to the point that he desired his will over God's will. That is where the problem lies for most people; we are so disturbed by God's will that we shut Him out and choose our own way!

Third Truth Revealed – THE CROSS

Jesus' plan to give Peter the keys must have met Peter's approval since there were no objections from Peter. But for the keys to work and the Church to be established, Jesus knew that the cross was inevitable and the resurrection was essential. Jesus continued to build truth upon truth to teach the disciples God's plan. Matthew 16:21 states, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Truth Rejected – THE CONFLICT

All of a sudden, Peter's heart erupted in turmoil! To think of Jesus dying on a cross was just too extreme for Peter to accept. He wanted to help Jesus see that this was not going to work. Matthew 16:22 says, "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'" You see, sometimes God's words and will can call for extreme surrender on our part. Isaiah 55:8 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."

At this juncture, Peter moves from following Jesus to trying to lead Jesus. The divine imperatives were clearly stated by Jesus, "...he must go to Jerusalem and suffer." Peter chose to reject the Word of God, which led him to rebel against the will of God. This can also happen in our lives when we reason that we know a better way than God's way.

Peter was out of line and he needed to be confronted. Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Peter surrendered all until all was too much to accept. We are so like Peter. We surrender all in salvation, all at a retreat, all to go on a short-term mission trip, but do we surrender all in prayer when we are in the daily grind of life? Do we surrender all when we think Jesus is wrong and we know a better way?

How often does "my way" keep me from "His way"? When we stop following Jesus and start leading Jesus, we assume we know more than God knows. We should be seeking God not setting God straight. The question we must answer is, are we letting Jesus lead us or are we trying to lead Jesus?

Action Steps

To help answer these questions, work through the following exercise:

1. Identify areas in your life which are preventing you from fully surrendering to God.
2. List the attitudes and actions of your life that you are justifying before God. Are you debating the Word of God in these areas of your life? Is “your way” keeping you from “His way”?
3. Look up and memorize one of the following verses: Psalm 18:30; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 33:4 or Isaiah 55:8-9.

Prayer For The Day

Read the following verses and offer a prayer to God that reflects your heart:

Isaiah 29:16

You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “He did not make me”? Can the pot say of the potter, “He knows nothing”?

Proverbs 26:12

Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Job 36:26

How great is God--beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out.

Job 37:5

God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding.

Week 3

SEARCHING
GOD’S WORD

Day 5

Learning The Truth

Today, we are going to focus on why a teachable spirit is important. Once again, Peter is our central character. Read John 13:1-17. In this text, Jesus sets an example for the disciples about how to love and serve others. Jesus lovingly places a towel around his waist and washes the disciples' feet. In this act of service, Jesus shows his disciples the full extent of his love (Vs 1). Jesus literally loved them with the truth.

Jesus began to wash his disciples' dirty feet. When Peter's turn arrives he quickly says, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replies, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." In response Peter exerts his will and says, "No, you shall never wash my feet."

As God reveals truth to us in prayer, like Peter, we may not always fully understand but we are called to obey. Faith willingly trusts that God knows best. Faith does not say "NO, NEVER!" but "YES, LORD!"

I learned this truth one day while filling my car up with gas. While pumping gas I noticed a man digging through the trashcans at the gas station. His clothes were shabby, his hair had not been cut for months, and he was in desperate need of some dental work. I prayed for this man as he began to drink out of bottles and cans that were left in the trash. I silently prayed and asked God if I should witness to the man. Continuing to pray, I could not get a peace in my heart about verbally witnessing to the man. The only thought that kept coming to mind was that God wanted me to buy the man a drink. By this time the man had walked in the store. I followed him in and asked him, "Sir, can I buy you a drink? I noticed you were drinking old drinks from the trash."

The man never looked up but only grunted, "Sure."

He went straight to the drink cooler, grabbed a drink and began to drink it. I told the cashier to ring up my gas and that man's drink. I paid for the drink and walked out. The man never said 'thank you' or even

acknowledged that I purchased the drink. I drove away wondering if I had missed God's leading in the situation. Not understanding what had happened, I simply decided to trust God and not try to figure it out.

Then, a few weeks later on a Sunday night, a young man approached me and said, "I want you to know that I have been visiting church here and have just returned from youth camp. While at youth camp I gave my life to Jesus."

I said, "That is wonderful, congratulations!"

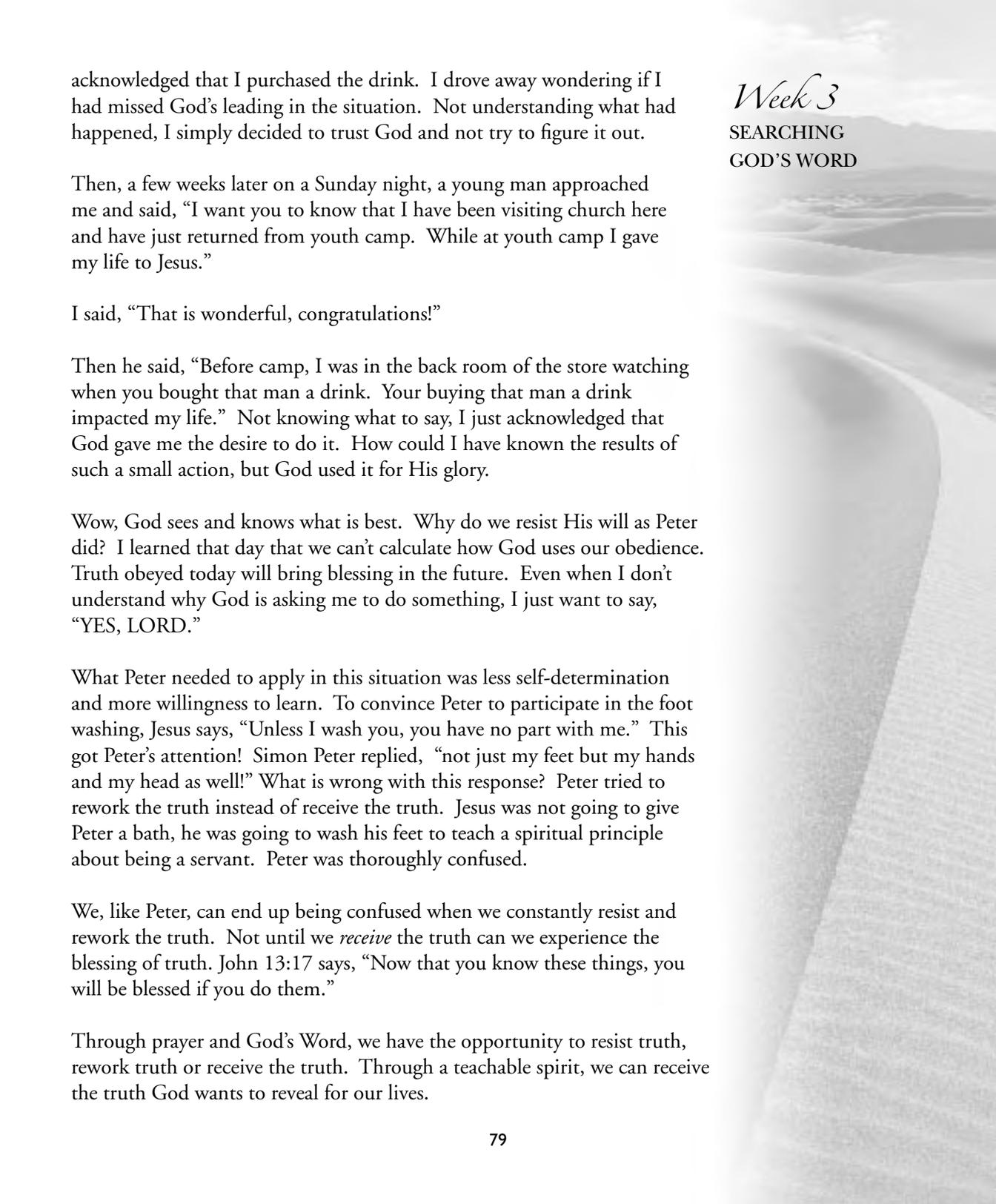
Then he said, "Before camp, I was in the back room of the store watching when you bought that man a drink. Your buying that man a drink impacted my life." Not knowing what to say, I just acknowledged that God gave me the desire to do it. How could I have known the results of such a small action, but God used it for His glory.

Wow, God sees and knows what is best. Why do we resist His will as Peter did? I learned that day that we can't calculate how God uses our obedience. Truth obeyed today will bring blessing in the future. Even when I don't understand why God is asking me to do something, I just want to say, "YES, LORD."

What Peter needed to apply in this situation was less self-determination and more willingness to learn. To convince Peter to participate in the foot washing, Jesus says, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." This got Peter's attention! Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" What is wrong with this response? Peter tried to rework the truth instead of receive the truth. Jesus was not going to give Peter a bath, he was going to wash his feet to teach a spiritual principle about being a servant. Peter was thoroughly confused.

We, like Peter, can end up being confused when we constantly resist and rework the truth. Not until we *receive* the truth can we experience the blessing of truth. John 13:17 says, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Through prayer and God's Word, we have the opportunity to resist truth, rework truth or receive the truth. Through a teachable spirit, we can receive the truth God wants to reveal for our lives.



Week 3
SEARCHING
GOD'S WORD

WWG

THROUGH PRAYER

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

(Psalm 139:23-24)

¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

(Psalm 51:10-12)

Action Steps

To help develop and grow your teachable spirit, complete the following exercise:

1. To fully grasp how God plants truth in our lives, read the following scriptures: Matthew 26:75; Luke 24:8; John 2:17; Acts 11:16.
2. To evaluate if we are resisting or reworking God's truth, fill out the following worksheet on absolute surrender.

Absolute Surrender Survey The Willingness To Say, "Yes Lord"

Circle the areas that need to be surrendered to God.

My attitude and feelings

My time

My reputation

My relationships

My body

My authorities

My family

My possessions

My mate

My successes and failures

My children

My anger and emotion

My career

My health or sickness

My finances

My life and death

My integrity

Prayer For The Day:

Pray a prayer surrendering each area to God.
Following is a model prayer:

God, I once considered _____ mine, but now I am trusting you with this part of my life.

I fully surrender _____ to you.

I am saying “Yes Lord” by claiming Galatians 2:20
I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

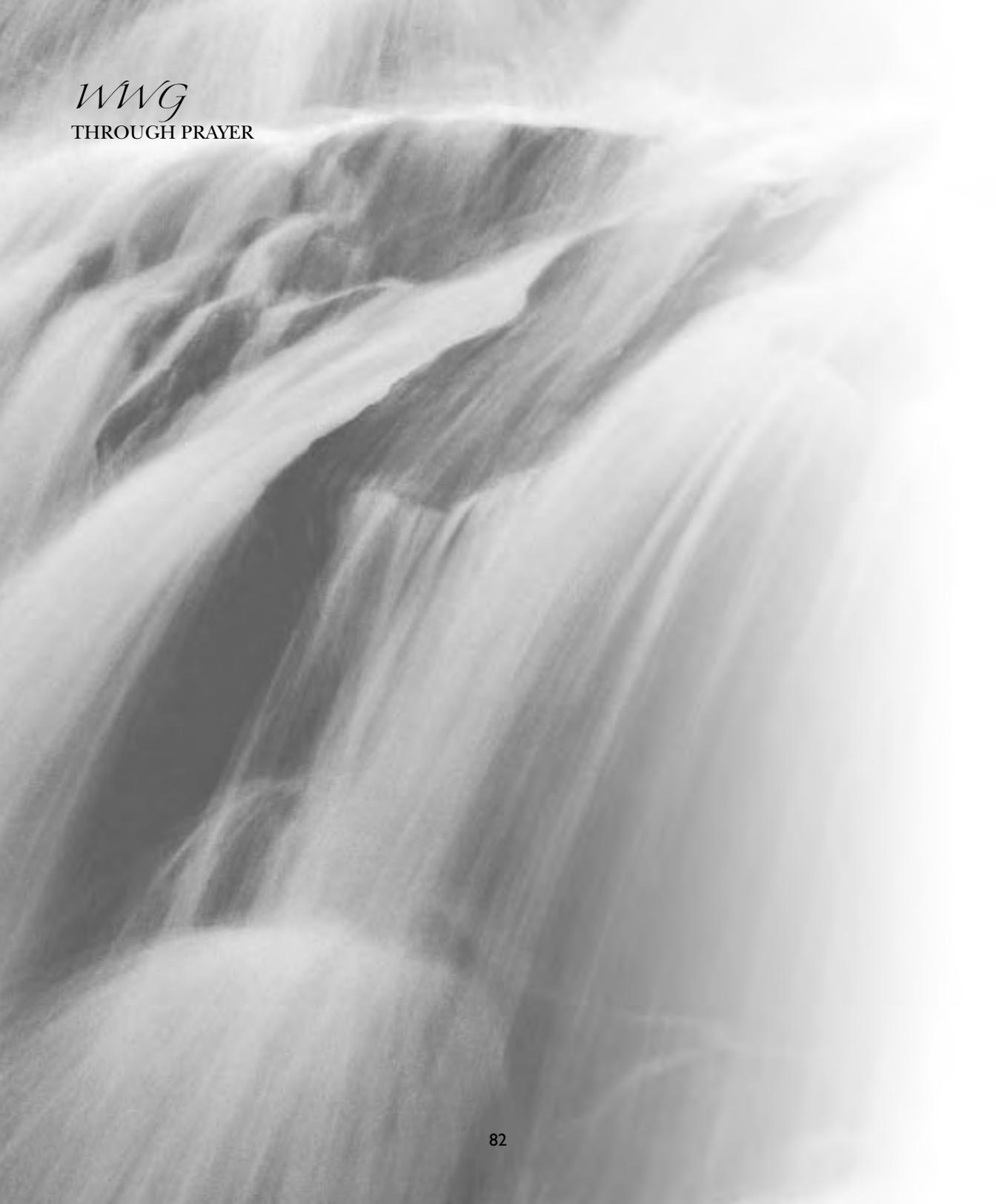
Date: _____

Signature: _____

Week 3
SEARCHING
GOD'S WORD

¹Henry T. Blackaby, Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: KNOWING AND DOING THE WILL OF GOD* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1990), 34.

² Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1981), 172.



WWG
THROUGH PRAYER

Day 1

Seeking God

In the last week of this study, we will see how to pray in a way that enables us to be obedient to God's will whatever the cost may be. Matthew 26: 36-46 reveals how Jesus fulfilled God's will through prayer. In this text, Jesus is praying about the cup that God had called him to take up. The cup Jesus is referring to is God's will for Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

Jesus clearly understood that He had to go to the cross. As you read the scripture in the margin, do you see the resoluteness of Jesus to obey the Father? Through prayer, God will supply that same resoluteness in our lives to take up the cup He has for us. But we must choose to obey.

Do you find it hard to obey God's will? For example, we know that we are not to gossip, but is the temptation to speak harmfully at the expense of others too hard to resist? If so, you can find the strength to avoid this temptation through prayer. Do you find it intimidating to witness to your lost co-worker or neighbor? If so, you can find the strength to share the good news through prayer. Whatever our cup may be, as we follow Jesus' example of surrendering to God's will through prayer, we will have the strength to obey God. The initial step is to seek God.

³⁶Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

³⁷He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

³⁸Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁹Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

⁴⁰Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter.

(continued page 84)

WWG

THROUGH PRAYER

⁴¹ "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

⁴⁶ Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

(Matthew 26:36-46)

Jesus Seeks The Source

As Jesus headed to His place of prayer, he requested that Peter, James and John pray. In Verse 38, Jesus said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." After requesting prayer, Jesus went a little farther, fell on his face, and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Then He returned and found Peter, James and John asleep.

Astonished that they were sleeping, He said, "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" Then, warning them about the powers of temptation, Jesus went away a second time to pray saying, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." This process of seeking human support and praying to God occurred three times. Each time Jesus found his disciples sleeping; however, it did not prevent him from returning to prayer.

If we are waiting for others to obey God before we obey God, it may be a very long time. If we are to fulfill the will of God through prayer, we should honestly request spiritual support but not base our obedience upon the faithfulness of others. Many sincere Christians have missed God's will because they were waiting for their friends or spouse to join them in their obedience. It is appropriate to request support, but our resolve must be to seek God until the issue is finalized.

Oswald Chambers Seeks The Source

Oswald Chambers, the writer of *My Utmost For His Highest* faced this type of struggle early in life. As a young man, Mr. Chambers was desperately trying to understand God's direction for his life. Because Chambers was a gifted artist, professors and friends reassured him that doors of opportunity would open for his artistic abilities to be used. While waiting for the right opportunity to arise, he began to struggle with the idea of becoming a minister. He knew that becoming a minister would mean exchanging a life work suited to his gifts for something that he had not desired.

Beginning to struggle in his heart with what God would have him do with his life. He knew the issue had to be settled with God in prayer. David McCasland recounts the experience as follows:

Week 4
SERVING GOD

Having decided to spend the entire night in prayer, he could think of no better place to be alone than on Arthur's Seat, the highest hill overlooking Edinburgh. Chambers prayed aloud, alternately thanking God and pleading with Him to make His way plain. He wanted to serve Him in art, to go where others could not or would not take the gospel of Jesus Christ. But the way seemed blocked and now, perhaps forbidden. "Oh God," he pleaded, "make Thy way plain to me."

As the hours wore on, his soul cried out in anguished silence. Sometime during the night, according to Chambers' account, he heard a voice that actually spoke these words, "I want you in My service – but I can do without you." Suddenly the call to the ministry seemed so clear. He was ready to obey . . .¹

We can seek the advice and support of others, but the final confirmation concerning the will of God must come through prayer. If we wait for the complete support and affirmation of our peers before we obey God, we will live in a spiritual limbo. If Jesus had completely depended on Peter for direction in His life, it would have been disastrous. In Matthew 16, Peter was instructing Jesus to avoid the cross. Then in Matthew 26, Peter sought to live by the sword when he cut off Malchus' ear to prevent Jesus from going to the cross. Peter meant well, but he was wrong.

WWG

THROUGH PRAYER

Will You Seek The Source?

To help you fulfill the will of God through prayer, answer the following questions to determine if you are truly seeking God.

⁴¹ "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

⁴⁶ Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

(Matthew 26:36-46)

1. What is the cup (the revealed will of God) God is calling you to take up?

2. Who have you enlisted to pray for you concerning this cup?

3. In fulfilling God's will, do you feel you are seeking human support and opinion over God's directions?

4. Are you willing to obey God even if others around you cannot understand or support you?

5. Are you willing to keep seeking Jesus for His will to be done in your life even if everyone around you is asleep or deserting you?

Prayer For The Day

Turn the following verses into a personal prayer to God.

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you." Psalm 84:1-2, 10-12

Day 2

Week 4
SERVING GOD

Surrendering To God

Once we resolve to seek God in prayer, the next step is to surrender to God's will. Surrendering is a challenging process because it involves honesty and change. Often God will ask us to do what we feel incapable of doing. Thus, for God to do through us what we cannot do ourselves, we must surrender completely to God's will and power. In Matthew 26:36-46, we see Jesus surrender to God in prayer. Jesus' surrender to the Father's will involved submission, sorrow, and strength. We must grow in these three areas if we are to fulfill God's will.

The Submission

The evangelist Billy Graham struggled with the fact that God had called him to preach. Mr. Graham found himself grappling with this call by taking long walks at night across a golf course. He continued to conclude that he was not properly educated and people would not listen. In the book *To All The Nations*, John Pollock recounts these events as follows:

One night in March 1938 Billy Graham returned from his walk and reached the eighteenth green immediately before the school's front door. 'The trees were loaded with Spanish moss, and in the moonlight it was like a fairyland.' He sat down on the edge of the green, looking up at the moon and stars, aware of a warm breeze from the south. The tension snapped. 'I remember getting on my knees and saying "O God, if you want me to preach, I will do it."'”²

Billy Graham had hesitated before because for him the call was absolute. If he accepted, he must henceforth have no other ambition, no other occupation but the proclaiming of God's message, everywhere, to everybody, always.

After this process of submission through prayer, God was able to work through Billy Graham to accomplish His will. God may or may not be calling you to preach, but God has a call for all Christians to fulfill. For Jesus it was to die on the cross. Jesus grappled with this call not on a golf course but in a garden. Matthew 26:39 says, “He (Jesus) fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’”

Jesus shared honestly that if the cup could be taken away, that would be great. True honesty allows us to be real with God and this is needed. In sharing honestly, we must be careful to move toward obedience to God’s will not resistance to God’s will. Prayer is the battleground for empowered ministry. Whether we choose to battle on a golf course or in a garden, we must battle until we can say “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” This surrendering process often involves sorrow.

The Sorrow

As Jesus surrendered to “drink the cup” that God had willed for Him, he experienced sorrow (John 18:11). Jesus knew He would soon bear on His body the sins of the world (1 Peter 2:24). With this understanding, He willingly surrendered, but not without heart felt cries and tears.

Hebrews 5:7-8 says, “*7 During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.*”

Sorrow can deal with many aspects of life. No doubt Jesus was sorrowful about man’s sin, and the price that He would have to pay for that sin. As we experience sorrow, it may deal with many aspects of our lives. We may become sorrowful over personal sin, the sin of others, or the needed adjustments to fulfill the will of God. The point is, whatever sorrow needs to occur for absolute surrender, that is what God desires and requires. Do not be afraid of sorrow, but see it as the road that leads to freedom. Will you willingly travel that road? If so, you will receive the strength of God.

The Strength

Week 4
SERVING GOD

As Jesus experienced sorrow in prayer, he also experienced strength in prayer. Luke 22:43 says, “An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.” What an encouragement God provides as he strengthens us to accomplish His will. Paul also learned this truth after receiving a thorn in the flesh. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 tells how Paul was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him from becoming conceited. On three occasions, he asked God to take it away. God responded by saying, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul grasped this truth and replied by saying, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” The bottom line is, God gives his power and strength to those who surrender to His will.

Are you interested in surrendering by way of submission and sorrow in order to receive the strength of God? If so, answer the following question that will prepare you to surrender to the source (God).

Action Steps

Read about Isaiah’s encounter with God in Isaiah 6:1-13 and answer the following questions.

1. Why is it significant that Isaiah saw God the same year King Uzziah died?

2. Has God ever used a death of a person or a vision to draw you into an encounter with Him?

3. Read verses 1-4. How did Isaiah describe God? Can you think of a time you had a real encounter with the presence of God? How did it affect you?

4. Read verse 5. What happened to Isaiah as a result of his encounter with the awesome, living God? How can you relate? Why is such an encounter essential to surrender?

5. How did God respond to Isaiah's repentance (verses 6-7)?

6. In verse 8, God reveals His will to a surrendered Isaiah. How does Isaiah respond in Verse 9? What has God revealed to you? Have you answered that call?

7. Finally, God reveals the hardness of the call to Isaiah in verses 9-13: No perks, mean, stubborn people, hard work and no immediate fame. Still, Isaiah obeys. Why? How can you obey, even if God calls you to something hard and outside your comfort zone?

Prayer For The Day

Week 4
SERVING GOD

Read the following poem then take time to pray and pour out your heart to God about surrendering to the commission He has for you.

Real Surrender

“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere,” I proclaim,
Yet, I spend all my time everywhere but resting in your Name.

“As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for you,” I recite,
But then I spend all my time in the trite.

You look down and see man “harassed, helpless and lost,”
I walk by and don’t even think to count the cost.

“Ask, seek and knock,” persevere in prayer I exhort,
But on my knees I find 10 minutes a chore.

“I surrender all,” I agree with the Sunday choir,
While all week I race, run and rush in my own strength to aspire.

“It is all about You,” is the praise song I sing,
So why do I live all about me in the dailiness of things?

Hardness of heart slips in while I go through the motions,
All the while faking my devotion.

How depressing you say, but if honest, you’ve been there I know,
In the rut, in the mask, in the struggle of the show.

O God help me be real and by your power live truth,
Not for attention, accolade or position
But solely for You in loving submission.

Realness to hunger, seek, find and follow
So others may see a life that is not hollow.

Michelle Sterling

Day 3

Standing For God

After Jesus surrendered to God's will, he had to stand up and step out in obedience. His obedience would please the Father, but produce conflict with others. Once we decide to surrender to God, we then face the challenge of others questioning or criticizing our call.

In Matthew 26:45-56, Jesus faced this challenge with Peter, James, and John. In verses 45-46, we find Jesus returning from his third session of prayer. He found Peter, James, and John, still sleeping. Substituting sleep for prayer did not produce surrender in their lives. Jesus said to the disciples, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Jesus, fully surrendered to the will of God, was ready to take action. The process of prayer brought perspective and peace, enabling Jesus to willfully encounter all the trouble and heartache that would soon transpire. Jesus had invited the disciples to pray with him, but they failed. In turn, they were unprepared to embrace the will of God.

Peter demonstrated his unpreparedness by drawing the sword and cutting off the ear of Malchus (John 18:10). Jesus graciously healed Malchus' ear and corrected Peter's impulsiveness by saying, "Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" (Mt. 26:52-54).

Often, sincere but misled friends and family can draw the sword of critical questioning. They cannot understand the will of God for our lives because they have not prayed. When this happens to us, we like Jesus, must resolve to stand strong and sure in the conviction that we are fulfilling the will of God from the Scriptures. When Jesus said, "Rise, let us go!" He knew that the rising and going would ultimately be without Peter, James, and John.

In Matthew 26:31-32 Jesus told the disciples, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” Peter responded to this by saying: “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

Week 4
SERVING GOD

Peter meant well, but he was trusting in his own strength and strategy, which was in direct conflict with God’s. Peter had failed to pray, and that left him to handle things himself. This led him to live by the sword of the flesh rather than the sword of the spirit (Heb. 4:12). Can you relate?

Challenged To Stand – Anne’s Testimony

Is your path to fulfill the will of God being challenged by a well-meaning person? Are you prepared to stand strong, even if it means standing alone? Consider the following story shared by a lady named Anne who struggled to obey God’s leading when those around her disagreed with what she knew God was asking her to do.

Philippians 3:8 says, “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.” This is the verse the Lord led me to in my daily quiet time over a period of weeks. The prayer of my heart was to completely surrender every area of my life to the Lord and experience personally the greatness of knowing Christ. To consider everything rubbish. At this point, I was thinking in terms of worldly possessions, my dreams, my desires. When the Lord began to reveal to me that he wanted me to step down from my areas of service in the church, I thought that this couldn’t be right. I must have misunderstood the Holy Spirit’s leading.

God was allowing me to serve as a soloist in the choir, a Sunday School teacher in the youth and as a member of the newly formed Praise Team. How could God ask me to give up these ministries? It was especially hard to understand why God would tell me to leave the music ministry. I passionately desired to reach out to the hurting and lost through the words of music so they could find Christ. This left me asking, “What are you doing, Lord?”

Anytime we decide to abandon everything to the call of Christ, we are going to face opposition, even from well-meaning, godly people. Through this struggle, I began sharing with a few people what I thought the Lord was leading me to do. Their advice was sincere, but ultimately proved to be misleading. In fact, spiritual leadership in the church counseled me not to stop using my talent in music. They said, “You will be burying your talent, which means you will be out of God’s will.”

You can imagine my confusion at this point because these were godly people I knew and trusted. Going home, I immediately fell on my knees and cried out to God for clarification. After praying, I knew that I would have to step out on faith and surrender to what God was leading me to do even if no one else understood at first. As hard as it was for me to give up my desires in singing and not fear disappointing other Christians, I followed Christ obediently and resigned at the dismay of spiritual friends and leaders.

Amazingly, two weeks later without any notice, my husband lost his job. We were forced to find a new source of income that led us to move to a different state. Wow! Isn’t God good! God knew all along what was coming.

The Lord confirmed to me through this trial that I had done the right thing in surrendering to Him. I learned that ultimately Christ holds the answers for our lives and that my personal relationship with Him is more important than anything I could ever do for Him. It is true; God reveals His will to those who seek Him in prayer and are willing to stand in obedience.

Action Steps

1. Are you more like Peter or Anne?

2. Read Galatians 1:10. Who are you seeking to please?

3. Are your decisions borne out of a prayer time with God or influenced by public opinion?

4. What steps do you need to take to avoid sleeping in the garden and using the sword to chop your way through life?

5. What steps do you need to take to obey God even if it does not please everyone around you?

Prayer For The Day

“He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to *stand*.” Ps. 40:3

From the heart of a man who knew what it cost to obey God rather than man, came the words from Psalm 40. Read this Psalm and ask God to personalize it in your life and lead you to stand in obedience for Him.

Day 4

Steadfast With God

Jesus is standing strong and moving forward toward the cross to fulfill God's will. This journey begins with the kiss of betrayal from Judas. On the road to the cross, Jesus suffered on many occasions. He experienced abandonment, false accusations, abusive language, physical beatings, and death upon the cross. All of the suffering was painful, with an element of loneliness present in each case. When we obey God's truth, we too may experience the loneliness involved in suffering.

The people around Jesus knew the truth, but were unwilling to accept the truth. This left Jesus to fulfill God's will alone. We know in Matthew 26 that the disciples deserted Jesus. Alone, Jesus moved through the night led by a group of bounty hunters and betrayed by Judas to an unjust trial. In the distance, Peter is following, trying in his own strength to prevent Jesus from going to the cross. Peter would soon deny Jesus three times. Through this denial, Peter realized that Jesus had been speaking the truth and he had been rejecting the truth. Through his rejection, Peter left Jesus lonely and unsupported. Peter is just one of the many who rejected the truth given to him by Jesus.

As Jesus suffered, we too will suffer (we are not above our Master). We may experience unjust physical, psychological, verbal, financial, or other forms of abuse. In whatever form suffering may come, it has the potential to leave us feeling like we have been deserted (loneliness). In the presence of desertion, we may question if following the truth is worth the pain involved. During such times, we must realize that God uses loneliness to deepen us in following after Him. Jesus said in Mark 8:34-38, we must be willing to leave all to follow Him. Paul experienced everyone deserting him in 2 Tim. 4:14-18 as he faithfully proclaimed the gospel.

Truth and loneliness often accompany each other on the road to fulfilling God's will, but the comfort we can rest in is that truth is always proved right and God never deserts us. We must hold steadfast to truth as we trust that God will handle any rejection and loneliness we may experience.

Are you willing to walk the road of suffering to fulfill God's will? It is my prayer that we will always follow God. But the reality is that the temptation to give up is always taunting us to take an easier road. This taunting, whether from friends or enemies, is always an attack from Satan. We must hold true to the prayer of surrender we made in our Garden of Gethsemane to do God's will, not our own will. If you are struggling with the reality of loneliness, consider the following story shared about a faithful missionary who felt the stinging pain of loneliness.

Loneliness in Action

Theodore Roosevelt was coming home from Africa where he had been hunting big game. When he boarded the ship at the African port, they rolled out the red carpet for him. Crowds gathered on the dock and cheered him. On board, he was given the finest suite, and during the voyage, he was the center of interest.

Another man boarded the ship at the same time. He was an old missionary who had given his life for Christ in Africa. Now his wife was dead, his children gone. Aged and worn out, he was returning to America. But no one noticed him; no one showed interest in him.

When the ship docked at San Francisco, a great crowd greeted Mr. Roosevelt. The bells rang, the whistles blew, and again they rolled out the red carpet. He landed amid pomp and glory. But no one was there to meet the missionary. No one noticed him. He went to a small hotel to spend the night.

That evening he knelt by the side of the bed and prayed, "Lord, I am not complaining, but I just don't understand. I gave my life for You in Africa, but it seems that no one cares. Lord, I just don't understand." And in the moment, it seemed that the Lord reached down from heaven laid His hand on the old man's shoulder, and said, "Missionary, you're not home yet."

Have you been suffering for living truth? Have you felt lonely? If so, may I ask, have you prayed about your loneliness? If not, you should because God needs to lay His hand on you and remind you that you're not home yet.

Week 4 SERVING GOD

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me".

(Mark 8:34)

¹⁴*Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done.*

¹⁵*You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.*

¹⁶*At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.*

¹⁷*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.*

¹⁸*The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

(2 Timothy 4:14-18)

Action Steps

Evaluate the chart below to discover that those who abandoned or abused Jesus did eventually realize the truth whether they accepted it or not. This chart will help you see that truth is always proven right. The question is, will we respond to truth and take the suffering and loneliness that may be involved in fulfilling God's will? Or will we reject the truth of God for a version of our own will that ultimately leaves us empty. Will we, like Peter, hear the rooster crowing?

Name	Rejection of Truth	Realization of Truth	Response to Truth
Judas	Matt. 26:14 Judas Agrees to betray Jesus Matt. 26:49 Judas betrays Jesus	Matt. 27:1-10 Judas is seized with remorse, returns the money, hangs himself...	Sadly, we see no evidence that Judas repents of his sin.
Disciples	Matt. 26:56 The Disciples desert Jesus	Luke 24:36-49 The Disciples realize Jesus is alive!	Luke 24:52 The Disciples trade discouragement and doubt for worship of their risen Lord.
Peter	Matt. 26:31-35 Peter refuses to accept the truth.	Matt. 26:75 Peter remembers Jesus' words of truth as the rooster crows the third time.	Matt. 26:75 Peter weeps bitterly in repentance and starts on a road of restoration.

Prayer For The Day

O God, may I be like the disciples and not like Judas. May I see your truth and respond no matter the cost. Take me from clinging to my comfort and my common sense, and plunge me into dependence on Your Word and Your way. May I not fear suffering or loneliness, for You are with me and much acquainted with both. Make me like Jesus' mother Mary, who when confronted with truth said, "I am the Lord's servant; may it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38)
Amen.

Day 5

Week 4
SERVING GOD

Sharing God With Others

On this final day, we will see that Jesus continued walking with God through prayer as He fulfilled the will of God. Jesus' complete obedience opened doors of opportunity to share God with those around Him. We must realize that when we pray, it is not for the sake of saying we have fulfilled our spiritual duty. Prayer should always lead us to live truth and therefore bring glory to God. As we bring glory to Him through praying and obeying, others will see our hope in Christ. They will see a realness, a purpose, a difference that will cause them to hunger or hate. They will hunger to know the Christ that we glorify, or they will harden their hearts and may even hate us.

Jesus' obedience to the will of God was a living testimony of truth to everyone who watched Him walk down the grueling road that led to the cross. Some hungered after Him, others continued in their hatred and hardness. It all started in the garden, but Jesus had to carry through to the cross. Isn't that the hard part for most of us? The follow through, the perseverance, the onward pressing that takes us down roads we would not have chosen is the most difficult part of full surrender. Consider Jesus. What would His garden of Gethsemane surrender be worth if He never followed through with the cross?

Jesus followed through! He took the kiss of betrayal from Judas, the denial of Peter, trials littered with false testimonies, cruel physical beatings, crude verbal abuse and agonizing physical death as He bore the sins of the world. Each of these incidents was only part of the whole in fulfilling God's will. Jesus would not fulfill the will of God until He finally gave His life as a sacrifice for sin.

Jesus' complete obedience serves as a call for us to evaluate our lives and determine if we are falling short in fulfilling God's will. There is an incredible temptation to give up on God when the world turns up the heat of temptation. As we leave our sanctuaries of prayer and begin living out the truth, people are watching. People will always be eager to test the truth we claim to possess. They want to see if our faith is worth having. If we give up on God's will half way through, then we will miss opportunities to share God with others. Consider Jesus...

Example / Jesus & Two Criminals

The witness of our love for God can open the door of opportunity to share His love with those who have no hope. This was true for Jesus as many different types of people watched His walk to the cross. There was an angry, spiteful, mocking crowd jeering and cheering. There were common people, soldiers, Jewish leaders, Roman officials, and even two thieves hanging on crosses to his left and right. Jesus never lost sight of God's will for His life during it all. This enabled him to see these people as being in need rather than accusers, users and traitors.

Matthew 26:44 records, the following testimony about the two thieves: "In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him." Jesus was being ridiculed and mocked from all sides. In this onslaught of abuse, Jesus' heart was shining like the noonday sun. From his heart, Jesus prayerfully pleaded with God for the forgiveness of the very ones who were crucifying Him. After His prayer, Scripture reveals that they cast lots for his clothes, the rulers sneered, and the soldiers mocked Him. During all of this painful abuse, Jesus never once lashed out with words of bitterness.

Luke 23:39 records, that one criminal continued to hurl insults. He taunted Jesus by saying, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" However, the other criminal obviously had a change of heart. Verses 40 and 41, "But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

What caused this thief on the cross to move from insulting Jesus to speaking in His defense? How did this change of heart occur? I believe this thief watched Jesus supernaturally fulfill the will of God. He saw the undeniable evidence of Jesus' love for God and others lived out under extreme persecution. Simply put, it was truth in action in the behavior and words of Jesus. In turn, the thief saw his need for God and his hopelessness without God. In Luke 23:42 this thief cries out, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Wow! An abusive thief is forgiven and receives the promise of paradise.

Action Steps

Week 4 SERVING GOD

In the fire of testing, it can be challenging to complete God's will. What type of test are you facing? Is your boss ridiculing you for standing up for what is right? Have your friends purposely left you out to see how you will react? Are you married to a lost mate who constantly badgers you about serving God? Is it false accusations, unjust suffering, sickness, or persecution that is testing you? Whatever your situation, do you see opportunity, or obstacle?

Can you think of a time when God turned a pressure situation into an incredible witnessing opportunity? How did prayer play a part in your seeing and seizing this opportunity?

Are you a living testimony of a life that is walking with God through prayer, no matter the cost?

Does your obedient life under pressure reveal to others their need for God?

Do people see that it is not just religion you claim, but it is a personal relationship with God you possess?

Consider the following testimony shared by Dr. Tony Evans. Dr. Evans shares how his Father's salvation and walk with God was tested and proven true as Mr. Evans touched the lives of others. As you read this story, evaluate your own life in order to determine if your life is touching others.

Example / Mr. & Mrs. Evans

Tony Evans' testimony shared in Des Moines, Iowa:

I was born in the inner city of Baltimore, Maryland, in the ghetto. I was going nowhere. My mother and father fought like cats and dogs. I remember now how they got onto each other. Fist fights, knife fights, everything. They were on their way to a divorce.

But one day my Daddy went to work. There was a white man that sat down next to him and said. If you died right now, do you know if you'd go to heaven? My father said, "I can't say that I would go to

heaven.” That day he shared with my Daddy. My Daddy accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and we knew that the man that went to work that day was not the same man when he came home that night.

The only time he could read his Bible was at 2:00 in the morning while my Mother was asleep. He would get up and come downstairs in order to pray. One of his prayers was, “Lord, if you will give me the strength, I will by your grace save my family, but I can not do it apart from a miraculous intervention by you.”

My Mother made life miserable, but a year later, he heard her come down the stairs at 2:00 in the morning while he was reading his Bible. He thought, “Oh no, not another battle!” But this time was different. When she came down, she was crying. He said, “What’s wrong?” She said, “Every time I hate you, you love me. Every time I reject you, you accept me. Every time I turn you away, you pray for me. I have been watching you and I thought this must be some religious fad that you’re on, but you have been on this non-stop for a year. Whatever you have must be real. How can I have it right now?” My Father got on his knees with my Mother and led her by faith to Christ.

She became a fruitful vine. My Father gathered my siblings around the table, witnessed to us, and we all accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior. All of a sudden, our little home in this inner city block was unlike the rest of the other homes.

I became the first person in my family to finish High School. I became the first person in my family to graduate from College. I became the first African American to get my Doctorate from Dallas Theological Seminary. While I was working on my Doctorate, we started a ministry of 10 people in my home that is 5000 today. While we developed the church, we started a radio broadcast that is heard by 450 stations across this United States and by 40 Countries around the world.

I didn’t tell you this to tell you about me. I told you this because of my Daddy. You see, he learned to fear God, and when he did, My Mother became a fruitful vine and I became an Olive Plant. Then he took us and raised us up in Zion and that’s the reason why I’m in the community of Des Moines, Iowa tonight.³

Prayer For The Day

Week 4
SERVING GOD

Lord, as I come to the end of this study, may I not walk away the same. May I not take the truth and sit on it. Convict me to apply all you have made clear to my heart. Search my heart, reveal all you want from me in my time, talents, relationships and responsibilities.

O God, may I have a testimony that speaks of your supernatural love and glory! May I not live in yesterday's testimony, but may I have a living testimony everyday. Through your eyes may I see opportunities and appointments from you, rather than obstacles and aggravations. O God, convict me each day to seek your face in prayer that I may know more of you and less of me. Amen.

Be Still

You love me.
You saved me.
You cry out as I awake,
But I rush ahead not caring our precious time is at stake.

Your still small voice whispers to my heart,
But into myself I immediately dart.

Such shared precious moments,
So blessed with your sweet presence,
My failing to come again to you makes absolutely no sense.

Without time in prayer, I push on in a frenzied race,
So not living in your abundant, abiding grace.

In my own strength, your reflection is distorted,
And the chance for a lost sinner to see You, Jesus, is aborted.

Jesus make my life a picture of your life giving cross,
And in those first moments be reminded to count
everything but You a loss!

Michelle Sterling

¹ David McCasland, Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1993), 56,57.

² John Pollock, To All The Nations: The Billy Graham Story (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 21,22.

³ Promise Keepers, *Hope For a New Millennium* (Auburn, Calif.: Fresh Air Media, 1999), video.



CONCLUSION

As this study on prayer ends, I hope your prayer life is just opening up to a completely new walk with God. In conclusion, I want us to consider how walking with God through prayer changed Peter's life. While Jesus is our perfect model for walking with God through prayer, Peter is an example with whom we can all relate. Let's take a look at Peter's journey.

Peter had watched Jesus place a priority on prayer from the beginning (Mark 1:35). Peter also began to see a need for prayer in his own life. In Luke 11:1, the disciples asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray." At the end of Jesus' public ministry, Peter walked with Jesus into the garden for a time of prayer. Jesus called Peter to pray (Matt. 26:36-46), but he fell asleep repeatedly. Can you relate?

Awakened from sleeping, Peter drew his sword in opposition to the will of God. He secretly followed Jesus to trial (Matt 26:58). He publicly denied Jesus around the fire (Matt. 26:70). He was inwardly convicted as Jesus looked at him during his denial (Lk. 22:61). He fled into the night weeping bitterly over his failure to stand for Jesus. Peter had tried in his own strength, according to his own will, to follow Jesus and had failed. Can you relate?

If Peter had prayed as Jesus had taught him (Lk. 11:1-4), He would have avoided sin, failure and regret. Prayer is about desiring God's will according to God's Word. It is surrendering what seems right or logical to us, and simply trusting His Word and Way. We must learn to pray this way if we are to walk with God through prayer. Peter was on a journey in his prayer life. Are You?

Even though Peter loved Jesus, he had not been willing to let go and trust Jesus fully. True love is willing to trust all. Jesus gave Peter a second chance. After the resurrection, Jesus approached Peter to call him to service based on love (John 21:15-19). Jesus confronted Peter with the question, "Do you love me?" If so, "Feed my sheep." What He was communicating to Peter is the same message He communicates to us today: If we really love Jesus, we will obey Him (1 John 1:3-6). Will you?

Peter, in the Book of Acts, is very different from Peter in the gospels. Why? Peter had progressed on his prayer journey. Through prayer, he increasingly surrendered more of his will to more of God's will. In Acts, Peter is a man of prayer not pride, a man of power not promise, and a man of compassion not just passion. For example, we find Peter waiting in prayer in the upper room until he was endued with power (Acts 1&2). The result was that 3000 were saved at Pentecost. In Acts 3, we find him healing a crippled man on the way to pray at 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Peter had the power of prayer before the hour of prayer because he was walking with God in prayer. Another 2,000 people were saved as a result of the crippled man being healed (Acts 4:4). In Acts 10, we find Peter resting on the rooftop of Simon the tanner's house, when God speaks to him in a vision. The result

of this prayer meeting was Peter overcoming prejudice toward the Gentiles, which led to the Gentile Pentecost where many were saved (Acts 10:47-48). Do you see a change in Peter's prayer life? Do you see a similar change in your own prayer life?

Once Peter's self will had been broken, then his love for Jesus was empowered through prayer. His true love caused him to obey rather than challenge the Word of God. His true love caused him to say, "Yes, Lord!" rather than, "Let's do it my way, Lord!" Peter had become a man who walked with God through prayer.

The same can be true for us. If we are to lead the lost to salvation, offer healing to hurting people, and overcome racial prejudice, this can only occur as we allow God to change us through prayer. Our love for God must lead us to say, your will not mine, your strength not mine, your glory not mine. This type of surrender only comes through the Word of God and prayer. This must be done daily and it is so needed in our lives. Surrender your will and continue on your journey of walking with God through prayer.