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Prayer

Study Group Guide



¹ Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of the mockers. ² But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 1:1–2

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Introduction

The studies on prayer in this collection were written by Dr. Timothy Keller at various times in the life of Redeemer Presbyterian Church. Some were Bible studies presented to the core group that founded Redeemer. Others were intended for use in Redeemer's small group network, and still others were talks given at Redeemer's Ministry Community Meetings. They are offered here for personal or group use.

Each study can be used separately by individuals or groups, or they may be studied as a series.

Groups may use the studies in several ways. Members may read them ahead of time, highlighting portions of particular interest and then gathering to summarize their thoughts and work through the Discuss and Pray sections. Or, one member may prepare during the week to present the material for the group and then facilitate discussion and prayer. Or, when time is at a premium, group members may simply take turns reading the study aloud, stopping to discuss and pray together. **The three studies on Corporate Prayer are lengthy. You may choose to study them in sections over several weeks.**

Redeemer Presbyterian Church wishes to acknowledge Greg and Lourine Clark, who devoted much time, effort, and prayer to bring this project to completion. Redeemer thanks them for their commitment and for their desire to make these materials available to a wider audience.

Prayer

{ Corporate Prayer 1 }

The Necessity in Revival

Study 1

INTRODUCTION

Christians are used to thinking about prayer as a means to get their personal needs met. More mature Christians understand prayer as a means to praise and adore God, to know him, to come into his presence and be changed by him. But the corporate aspect of prayer is not well known. How do we pray, repent, and petition *God as a people*?

We'll examine this question in this three-part study:

Study 1, What is spiritual renewal or revival? How does it come? Why is the one factor *always* present in every revival intense, kingdom-centered corporate prayer?

Study 2, What are we praying for specifically?

Study 3, What characterizes effective kingdom-centered corporate prayer?

Old Testament spiritual awakening and renewal

Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God continually fall into periods of spiritual stagnation, leading to a cultural accommodation of the idol worship and practices of surrounding pagan societies. Then there is a turning to God, the raising up of new leaders and a "covenant renewal," a restoration of spiritual vision and vitality. This pattern is particularly visible in the book of Judges but it continues throughout the reign of the kings, the captivity, and the return from exile. Just as Israel was constituted a people with the reading of the Law and the taking a covenant oath at Mt. Sinai, so the people must periodically remember who they are, renew the covenant, and return to the Lord. Sinai-like covenant ceremonies occur again before entering Canaan (Joshua 24), before the choosing the first king (1 Samuel 12) and after the return from exile (Nehemiah 8-9). Less formal but crucial renewal movements happen continuously. (See a string of them in Judges 3:7-11; 3:12-15; 4:1-4; 6:7-10; 10:6-16.)

If we look at all these various revivals, we are first struck by how different they are. Some are formal ceremonies, some seem to be spontaneous. Some are led by a strong central leader, and some seem to bubble out of the grassroots. But one thing is stated over and over again. We read, "Then the people cried out to the Lord." It is the only factor that is *always* present in every revival. It is corporate, intense, prevailing prayer—not for personal needs, but for the presence and reality of God among his people.

New Testament spiritual awakening and renewal

Even in the New Testament under the leadership of the apostles, it is evident that there is still a need for continual renewal. Just as Israel was made God's people at Mt. Sinai, so the church is constituted by the descent and filling of

the Spirit in Acts 2. But just as Israel is continually called to Sinai-like covenant renewals, so the church, even when it doesn't seem to be in major declension, receives fresh fillings of the Holy Spirit. "Mini-Pentecosts" happen in Acts 4:31, 7:55, 8:17, 10:44, and 13:9.

It is very easy to get distracted by the three unusual phenomena of the Day of Pentecost. They are:

- a. a mighty sound like a violent wind,
- b. visible tongues of fire over each person,
- c. and speaking in other tongues which each member of the multi-ethnic audience could understand in his or her native language.

Speaking in tongues occurs in some of the other Spirit fillings, but not in all, nor even in most. The central, abiding characteristics of Pentecost are:

- a. they were *together in prayer*;
- b. they were "filled with the Holy Spirit"; and therefore,
- c. they "began to speak... declaring the wonders of God."

Look at two incidents in Acts after Pentecost. The incident in Acts 4:31 is like Pentecost in that there is a period of prevailing prayer (4:24) and then a powerful shaking as everyone senses the presence of God descending. It is unlike Pentecost in that there were no tongues of fire or speaking in tongues. What does result again is "boldness" (an assurance of God's love and reality) and the ability to "speak the word of God."

The incident of Acts 7:55-56 is interesting because it is an individual experience, yet it has the same renewal dynamic. As Stephen is about to be executed, he raises his eyes to heaven (7:55), just as the believers in 4:24 raised their voices to God. He was "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 7:55). How so? We are told, "*full of the Holy Spirit, [he] looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' At this they covered their ears, and yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him... While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed... 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.'*" (Acts 7:55-60).

What happened? First, he prayed. He looked up. Second, by the power of the Holy Spirit, something Stephen knew with his mind became real to his heart. He saw Jesus "standing" at God's right hand. At the very moment that an earthly court was condemning him, he realized that the heavenly court was commending him. In other words, the "fullness" he experienced was an experience of the gospel. At that moment, he got an extremely vivid, powerful sight of what he already knew intellectually—that in Christ we are beautiful in God's sight and free from condemnation (Col. 1:22). But the Spirit took that intellectual concept and electrified his entire soul, mind, heart, and imagination with it. Finally, Stephen, though only for a moment, was able to exhibit the new

humanity that God is creating. He had courage. He forgave his oppressors. He faced his accusers not just with boldness, but with a calmness and joy. That is spiritual renewal. It is not simply an emotional experience—it is a heart-changing and therefore life- and practice-shaping work of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, what do all these incidents have in common? First, we see that there is a continual need to renew the fullness of the Spirit. Second, we see that the fullness is generally connected to prevailing prayer, especially in the face of a challenge.

Discuss

1. Why is personal or community renewal directly related to one's prayer life?

2. Why is there continual need for prayer and for renewal?

Pray *(See appendix A for suggestions on how to pray as a group)*

1. Pray for courage to let the Holy Spirit show you where specifically you (or your group) need renewal. Ask for his grace to lead you to a repentance that brings new freedom from sin and a greater appreciation of his love and forgiveness.

2. Pray for a spirit of prayer (of prayerful dependence) to increasingly characterize your individual lives and your corporate life together.

SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AND RENEWAL TODAY

Spiritual revival or renewal is a work of God in which the church is beautified and empowered because the *normal* operations of the Holy Spirit are intensified. These normal operations of the Spirit include:

- conviction of sin (John 16:8),
- enjoyment and assurance of grace and the Father's love (Rom. 8:15-16),
- access to God's presence (John 14:21-23; 2 Cor. 3:17-18),
- creation of deep community and loving relationships (Eph. 4:3-13).

This view differs or opposes three other common views:

1. The popular charismatic notion that sees revival as essentially as the addition of extraordinary operations of the Holy Spirit (miracles, healings, prophecy, revelations).
2. The popular fundamentalist view that revivals are simply especially vigorous seasons of evangelistic activity (e.g., an evangelistic crusade).
3. The popular secular view that revivals were primitive, emotionally cathartic events, occurring among uneducated people who were subject to psychological manipulation by evangelists.

Three marks of revival

In reality, there are three marks of genuine revival. First, there is *an outpouring of the Spirit* on and within the congregation, so that the presence of God among his people becomes evident and palpable. There is a new and deeper conviction of sin and repentance—not just for major 'behavioral sins' but for attitudes of the heart. There is then the experience of a far more powerful assurance of the nearness and love of God, with the end result that Christians become both humbler and bolder at once. The more deeply one feels his or her sin debt, the more intensely he or she feels the wonder of its payment.

"Nominal Christian" (i.e., Christian in name only) church members come to realize that they don't actually have a living relationship with Christ by grace and get converted. Long-time members talk about being converted or about Christ in radiant terms or express repentance in new ways. It electrifies people when this first begins to happen. Corporately, there is more passion, freedom and sense of the presence of God in the worship services.

Secondly, as a result of this outpouring of the Spirit, *the people of the world are brought into the church* and it begins to grow. Why? On the one hand, the renewed believers create a far more attractive community of sharing and caring, and often with great worship. There is the beautified community of the King. This can attract people from the outside. On the other hand, when Christians who begin to experience God's beauty, power, and love and put their relationship to Christ and the church first in their lives, they become more willing and confident to talk to others about their faith and less judgmental when they do so. They are also more willing to invite people to visit their

church. As a result, there are numerous conversions—sound, lasting and sometimes dramatic. Significant, even astounding, church growth occurs. Many churches in America grow rapidly, but almost completely through transfer growth. When that is the case, renewal dynamics are not strong in the church. But in revival, conversions are not a trickle.

In the U.S. from 1857-1859, a revival brought over a half a million new people into the church. In New York City, it is a well-documented fact that nearly all the churches grew fifty percent in membership in that two- to three-year period. At the same time, nearly a third of the population of Northern Ireland joined the church, and approximately ten percent of the entire population of Wales and Scotland were converted.

Thirdly, there is a *full impact on the community* surrounding the church and even the broader culture. Revivals produce waves of people who become involved in works of social concern and social justice. Major social justice movements such as abolitionism had strong roots in the revivals. The reason for this is that real holiness changes the private and public lives of Christians. True religion is not merely a “private matter,” providing internal peace and fulfillment. Rather, it transforms our behavior and our relationships.

The 1904-05 revival in Wales had created many social changes. Life in the coal pits was transformed; workers and management engaged in prayer meetings on company time. Many working people came to take aged parents home from the workhouses where they had been sent. Long-standing debts were paid, stolen goods returned, and crime rates plummeted.

Summary

These three marks of revival may be small or large, long or short, dramatic or quiet, widespread or localized. But when the renewal dynamics are in place, these effects are in evidence. Without these dynamics in place, a church can grow in numbers, but not in vitality, and thus the growth will not have lasting results. Actually, many churches in America do grow rapidly, but there are tell-tale symptoms of lifelessness. Most or all of the growth may be by transfer, not conversion. There is no deep conviction of sin or repentance and thus few people can attest to dramatically changed lives. Also, the growth of the many churches makes no impact on the local social order, because people do not carry their Christianity out into their use of wealth, their work, or their public lives. Without deep renewal of the gospel in the heart, our external lives will be ‘sealed off’ from what we believe, and our beliefs will never result in concretely changed living.

Discuss

1. **Assess the evidence of the normal operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of your group, of Redeemer. For example, what is the level of conviction of sin? Are we looking to the grace of Jesus and the love of God for our assurance and self worth? Do we act as though God were with us in all circumstances? Are we a deeply self-sacrificing community?**
2. **What can we do to welcome the Holy Spirit's work in our midst to a greater degree?**
3. **What can your group do to more fully enter into the life of the city as a renewed people?**

Pray

1. **Pray about your discussion and longings for your group and Redeemer.**

KINGDOM-CENTERED PRAYER

Biblically and historically, the one non-negotiable, universal ingredient in times of spiritual renewal is corporate, prevailing, intensive, kingdom-centered prayer. What is that?

It is focused on God's presence and kingdom. In *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* ¹, Jack Miller talks about the difference between "maintenance prayer" and "frontline" prayer meetings. Maintenance prayer meetings are short, mechanical, and totally focused on physical needs inside the church. But frontline prayer has three basic traits:

1. A request for grace to confess sins and humble ourselves;
2. a compassion and zeal for the flourishing of the church; and
3. a yearning to know God, to see his face, to see his glory.

It is quite clear whether these traits are present when listening to a prayer meeting. Most interesting is to study biblical prayers for revival, such as in Acts 4, or Exodus 33, or Nehemiah 1, where these three elements are easy to see. Notice in Acts 4:24-30, for example, that the disciples, whose lives had been threatened, did not ask for protection for themselves and their families, but only boldness to keep preaching!

It is bold and specific. The history of revivals shows one or a few or many who take the lead in praying fervently for renewal. Their pattern is Moses (Exodus 33:7), who pitched a tabernacle outside Israel's camp where he and others prayed for God's presence and to see his glory. Such prayer need not (indeed, usually does not) begin as an organized church program. Rather it is a private field of strong exertion and even agony for the leaders. The characteristics of this kind of prayer include:

- a. Pacesetters in prayer who spend time in self-examination. Without a strong understanding of grace, this can be morbid and depressing. But in the context of the gospel, it is purifying and strengthening. They "take off their ornaments" (Ex. 33:1-6). They examine their hearts for idols and set them aside.
- b. They then begin to make the big request—a sight of the glory of God. That includes asking:
 1. for a personal experience of the glory and presence of God ("that I may know you" [Ex. 33:13]),
 2. for the people's experience of the glory of God (v.15), and
 3. that the world might see the glory of God through his people (v.16). Moses asks that God's presence would be obvious to all: "What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

This is a prayer that the world would be awed and amazed by a show of God's power and radiance in the church; that it would truly become the new humanity that is a sign of the future kingdom.

It is prevailing and corporate. By this we mean simply that prayer should be constant, not sporadic and brief. Why? Are we to think that God wants to see us grovel? Why do we not simply put in our request in and wait? But sporadic, brief prayer shows a lack of dependence, a self-sufficiency; and thus we have not built an altar that God can honor with his fire. We must pray without ceasing, pray long, pray hard. We will find that the very process is bringing about that which we are asking for—to have our hard hearts melted, to tear down barriers, to have the glory of God break through. (We will cover more about prevailing prayer in the third study.)

Discuss

1. **How would our prayer need to change to become “frontline” prayer?**
2. **What would prevailing prayer look like in your life? In your group’s life? What are some specific things you and your group are willing to commit to in order to move towards prevailing prayer?**

Pray

In groups of two or three:

1. **Ask that you would, with full gospel assurance, nonetheless be hard on yourself. Ask God to show you ways this next week—even today—in which you don’t represent Christ as you should, in your relationships, in your work-life, in your family life, in your habits and attitudes and your relationships within the church.**
2. **Ask God to make things you know with your head about the gospel real to your heart, so that you can see where you need to change and change the way you live.**

Our Part in Renewal: BUILDING AN ALTAR

In conclusion, it is important to note that *we cannot create spiritual renewal* — only God can send the “fire.” We can only prepare the altar and the sacrifice. Then God can send the Holy Spirit.

As individuals. A good image for seeking the fullness of the Spirit is the concept of “building a life altar.” In the Old Testament, an altar was built and a sacrifice placed on it. Then God sent his fire to burn up the sacrifice (1 Kings 18). This is a great illustration of the dynamics of personal revival and spiritual renewal. Paul uses it when he tells us to offer ourselves as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1-2).

As a church. In Acts 1, we see Jesus helping the disciples build an altar. There are four parts at least.

1. First, a renewed church is **vision-driven**. In Acts 1:6-8, Jesus corrects their faulty vision of what he is going to do in the world. They were looking for a political campaign, and he tells them about the nature of the kingdom, which will spread through his disciples as they become his witnesses and ambassadors. The vision is that we, through our words and our lives, will bring people under the kingship of Christ, which will heal and repair all things.
2. A renewed church is **gospel-driven**. In Acts 1:9-11, Jesus ascends to heaven and the angels tell the disciples that now the knowledge of his ascension should empower them. Remember Stephen. It is only as we “preach the gospel to ourselves” about our standing in Christ that the Holy Spirit takes that truth and sets it on fire in our hearts, creating times of amazing assurance that equip us for service.
3. A renewed church is **prayer-driven**. In Acts 1:14 we see the disciples uniting in corporate, prevailing prayer. It is only in prayer and through prayer that the Holy Spirit takes up the vision and the gospel and makes them fiery realities in the centers of our being.
4. A renewed church is **leader-driven**. In Acts 1:15-26, we see the disciples asking for God to raise up leaders. Personal and corporate revivals occur through leaders which God identifies and equips.

Pray**Split into two groups.**

- 1. One group reads Romans 12:1-2 and asks God to work in each member's life in keeping with Paul's commands. Pray also for Redeemer Church as a whole.**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- 2. The other group prays for one or more aspects of a renewed church (as described above) for Redeemer and all Bible-believing churches in the metropolitan area.**

- 3. Agree that throughout the next week, you will continue to pray one prayer from this study that has particularly convicted or inspired you.**

¹ C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986).

Prayer

{ Corporate Prayer 2 }

The Focus of Kingdom-centered Prayer

Study 2

REVIEW

What is spiritual renewal?

Spiritual revival or renewal is a work of God in which the church is beautified and empowered because the *normal* operations of the Holy Spirit are intensified. The normal operations of the Spirit include: conviction of sin, enjoyment and assurance of grace and the Father's love, access to the presence of God, and the creation of deep community and loving relationships.

How does spiritual renewal come?

In the previous study, we looked at the times in both the Old and New Testaments when there was a revival and renewal of spiritual life in the people of God. At first we are struck by how different they are—some are formal ceremonies, some seem to be spontaneous; some are led by a strong central leader, some seem to bubble out of the grassroots, some are accompanied by spectacular signs and miracles, and some have nothing like that at all. But there is always one factor that is *always* present in every revival. It is corporate, intense, prevailing prayer, especially in the face of a specific challenge. This prayer is not for personal needs, but for the glory of God, for the beauty, palpable presence, and visible reality of God among his people. This is a prayer that the world would be awed and amazed by the evidence of God's power and radiance in the church, and that the church would truly become the new humanity that is a sign of the future kingdom.

In this study, we will further explore this type of prayer.

The Focus of Kingdom Prayer: SEEKING GOD'S SPIRIT AND GLORY

In November, 1740, Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon, "Praying for the Spirit," on the text Luke 11:13: "*How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*" Edwards begins by pointing out that there are basically two categories of things that we ask God to give us. First are "temporal" blessings—food and clothing, adequate housing, health and economic prosperity, happy and flourishing families, favor from friends and neighbors. Second are the blessings that we could classify as "praying for the Spirit." These include:

- our growth in holiness through the Spirit (1 Thess. 4:3-4)
- deeper participation in the divine nature itself (2 Peter 1:4)
- having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5)
- having the spirit (awareness, experience, and practice) of sonship (Gal. 4:7; Romans 8:15-17)
- having the light of God's face (Numbers 6:26; Ps. 16:11), and
- fellowship with God through the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17; 1 John 1:3).

But, Edwards says, there is a great difference in how frequently and intensely people pray for the first category of blessings than the second. They seek the former

...with much the greatest earnestness. When they are in want of these [temporal] blessings they are much more concerned about their want than about their want of [the Spirit] and are far more assiduous in seeking of them. They don't need any preaching to stir them up to take thorough care to obtain those outward things. Whenever they begin to be [even] a little in want of them, even if they ben't come to that but only foresee the danger of it, how will they bestir themselves! And if they begin to suffer for want of those things, how much do they make of their sufferings!... But when their souls languish for want of spiritual blessings, when it be a time of great scarcity and even famine on that account, how little are they are affected with this. They seem to be quiet about it. And when God is prayed to bestow [the Spirit] 'tis more a matter of form than anything else. If rain be withheld and there be a drought, or if there be sickness, everybody is concerned and how we cry out in prayer for rain or healing...

What did God call you to? Had God nothing better to bestow upon you, when he had made you his children, than a little money or land, that you seem so much to behave yourselves as if you thought this was your chief good?... I am bold to say that God is now offering the blessing of his Holy Spirit to this town, and I am bold to say we may have it only for the asking. But if we ask in such a manner that, at the same moment we ask, we show that we have no sense of the value of what we ask—if we ask in such a manner as implicitly to ask and deny at the same time—then we have no reason to think that we [have truly asked.] ¹

It is a powerful argument. The fact that we pray so much more instinctively, consistently, and fervently for money, health, reputation, approval, and social status than we do for the glory of God and the work of his Spirit shows what our hearts are really after and really trusting in. And, as Edwards argues, formal, infrequent, dispassionate prayers for the Spirit are not genuine requests at all. To ask in a way that shows we have no idea what we are asking for is the same (if not worse) than to not ask at all.

So—why should we begin to “pray for the Spirit”? Edwards implies that the very recognition of the disparity between prayer for personal material blessings and prayer for the Spirit in our lives reveals idolatry. To recognize and repent for the idols at the root of our spiritual passionlessness is always crucial to renewal. Here is one biblical example from Judges 10:9-16.

The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; and Israel was in great distress. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, “We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals.”

The LORD replied, "...You have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!"

But the Israelites said to the LORD, "We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now." Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD.

And [the Lord] could bear Israel's misery no longer.

Notice how the Israelites prevailed in repentant prayer despite the initial "brush-off" from God. They renounced their idols whether God was going to answer their specific prayer for material blessing or not. That showed that they had begun to seek God for his own sake, not just as a means to the end of having a prosperous, secure life. And that was the beginning of God's returning to show his glory in their midst.

To begin praying for the operations of the Spirit is not simply a matter of scheduling more time for it! *We have to repent for the reasons we haven't been praying for them.* We must reflect on biblical passages, recall the strongest works of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and consider the lives of men and women in history or the present that show us what the Spirit can do in a human life. We have to stir up a vision in our minds and a passion in our hearts for what the Spirit can do in us, and then pray with energy and endurance for the Spirit to come.

Discuss

- 1. What proportion of your prayer time is spent seeking resolution to things impacting you, your family, and your friends? What proportion of your prayer time is directed at seeking God's glory and the work of the Holy Spirit?**
- 2. If there is an imbalance, what idols might be weighing on your prayers?**

Pray

- 1. Pray that Redeemer's community would actually embody its beliefs about the gospel and its vision.**
- 2. Repent of the things that you value above God's love and Jesus' grace for your security and identity. Pray for a personal renewal to fully experience the working of the Holy Spirit.**

WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR SPECIFICALLY?

For God's Spirit in our hearts

Paul tells his Christian readers in Ephesians 3:16-19 that he is praying for them. What does he ask? He is praying for the Spirit for them. He asks for

- a. the Spirit to empower them inwardly;
- b. that Christ may dwell in their hearts;
- c. that they will know the love of Christ, and
- d. be filled with all God's fullness.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This is a perplexing prayer from one perspective. Paul is praying for Christians, who by definition are people who already have Christ dwelling within them! And surely all Christians know Christ loves them, or they wouldn't have saving faith. Not only that, but all Christians have the fullness of God dwelling in them (Col. 2:9-10.) So what is Paul asking for?

Just as it is one thing to have a bank account and another to draw on it, so it is one thing to have God as Father and Jesus as Lover and another thing to draw on that and actually experience it—to be actually shaped by it in the depth of your emotional life and in the breadth of your life out in the world. Paul wants us not to just believe that the full glory and greatness of God is within us, but to actually sense the glory, to be overwhelmed and filled with it. He is praying that we would grasp the truth of who and what Christ is until it becomes much more than a rational proposition. He wants us to come under its power so that it affects us from the inside out. For example, do you know God loves you? If you do, why do you get so inconsolable when others criticize you? When the truth of God's love for you really "catches fire", when the truth about God's love gets *big*—when it disturbs and comforts and thrills you—then you will find that criticism doesn't harm you as it did before. The truth has descended into the heart. That is what Paul is praying for.

Another case is Romans 8:15-16: *"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba' Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."* Verse 15 shows us that the Holy Spirit enables us to believe and feel that we are God's children. In other words, the Holy Spirit enables us to believe the gospel. Though every regenerate heart "knows" that we are children of God—and verse 16 alludes to this when it says that *our* spirit or heart already "testifies" that we are his—but there is also a deeper or higher assurance.

"The Spirit" himself comes along side of our spirit and testifies *with* it. This is the language of the courtroom. Our spirit, as it were, is on the witness stand, testifying that we are God's chosen, beloved children. However, there is a lot of evidence to the contrary! The verdict is, in a sense, in doubt. But then in comes the Spirit, like an expert witness. When he also testifies that we are God's children, and all doubts are then dissolved. The case is closed. Lloyd-Jones and many others understand this to mean that sometimes in our experience, we receive an infusion (a pouring in) of God's love and reality that goes beyond even the normal confidence that our hearts have. It is the difference between knowing that a man is your father, and being held in his arms. When one of us receives this "witness of the Spirit" we have personal renewal. When it is poured out on many people at once, we have a revival.

The evangelist Dwight L. Moody had a church in Chicago that was destroyed in the great fire of 1871. While in New York City raising funds for its rebuilding, he began praying for the power of the Spirit in his life. He sought to overcome his great sense of weakness and despondency after the great tragedy.

I was crying all the time that God would fill me with his Spirit. Well, one day, in the city of New York—oh, what a day!—I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay his hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths; and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world—it would be as the small dust of the balance.²

Jonathan Edwards explains these biblical texts we are considering (Exodus 33, Romans 8, Ephesians 1 and 3) in the following classic passage from his sermon, "A Divine and Supernatural Light":

There is a twofold knowledge of good of which God has made the mind of man capable. The first, that which is merely notional ...And the other is, that which consists in the sense of the heart; as when the heart is sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea of it. In the former is exercised merely ...the understanding, in distinction from the... disposition of the soul ...Thus there is a difference between having an opinion, that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former that knows not how honey tastes; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind.³

1. How has Jesus addressed our needs for security and for identity? How do you make the assurance of Jesus' love a reality in your life?

- 2. How could clearing out our idols and focusing on Jesus' grace change our prayers?**

FOR GOD'S PRESENCE AMONG HIS PEOPLE

If we ended our study of prayer for revival at this point, we might think that revival prayer is mainly a matter of seeking personal, inner experiences of God. But the point of corporate prayer is that we come together as a body, seeking God's presence in the community. Let's look at Exodus 33:15-20:

Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" ...Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said ... "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Here Moses goes beyond a prayer for a personal assurance and experience of God. He makes an enormous request. He wants to know God's glorious presence, but not just for himself. He wants the community of God's people to evidence the beauty and visible reality of God. This is a prayer that the world would be awed and amazed by the evidence of God's power and radiance in the believers.

In the New Testament, the church is called the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 3:16, Eph. 2:21-22, 1 Peter 2:5). That is an enormous claim! The Spirit's presence in our lives through Christ is a fulfillment of the Old Testament promise that God will indwell his people. In so doing, he will show the world the new humanity—a new human society in which business practices, race relations, family life, work and rest, sex, money, and power are all used to serve and promote the flourishing of others.

As an example, in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Paul says, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple?" He proceeds to argue with those who are destroying the unity and community of the church through their party spirit and the contentions between factions loyal to particular Christian leaders. Paul says that quenching the Spirit and destroying community are tantamount to tearing down God's temple. As Gordon Fee puts it:

The Corinthians were in the process of dismantling God's temple, because their strife and fascination with wisdom meant the banishing of the ...unifying Spirit from their midst. Hence this strongest of warnings. ...his temple, the place of his presence, is holy; and "you the church in Corinth are that temple." The gathered church is the place of God's own personal presence, by the Spirit. *This is what marks off God's new people from "all the other people on the face of the earth."* (Exodus 33:16). There is not a more important word in all the New Testament as to the nature of the local church than this one! ⁴

Paul understood that the Spirit's presence is not given simply to provide individuals with great experiences, but to make the Christian community a society that is absolutely unique, altogether apart, a community of love and truth and beauty. Corporate prayer is *prayer for the corpus—the Body*. Of course, the individual experience of the Spirit and the communal are integrally related. Christians who begin to experience God's beauty, power, and love put their relationship to Christ and the church first in their lives. They are more willing to talk to others about their faith and more winsome when they do so. They have more confidence in their church and are thus more willing to invite people to visit it. They also have new freedom to give to one another, not being as anxious or proud to acquire money and status. All of this serves to beautify the Christian community.

Ultimately, times of great spiritual renewal are times in which seekers or visitors can come into a gathering of Christians for worship and immediately sense a love that is so robust and "thick" you could almost cut it with a knife. Martyn Lloyd-Jones talked about it this way:

What is needed is something so striking and so signal that it cannot be explained in human terms. ...We can preach the truth, we can defend it, we can indulge in our apologetics, we can try to present a great front to the world, but, you know, it does not impress the world. It leaves the world where it was. The need is for something so overwhelming, so divine, so unusual that it will arrest the attention of the world and prove that we are indeed... the people of God. ...What is wrong in our own day is the disappearance of the uniqueness of the church. How difficult it is to see any difference between the church and the good organizations, the political societies, cultural societies. Watch their meetings and ask—can you tell any difference among them? We are nice people, we are respectable people... Ask God... "Shake us!" Not "shake the building"—shake us. Ask him to make us something that is so amazing that the world shall be compelled to look on and say "What is this?" as they said on the day of Pentecost; as they said when the Spirit was poured out upon Whitefield and the Wesleys.⁵

Discuss

1. What do we tend to do that “dismantles God’s temple” or destroys the unity and community of Redeemer?
2. If the grace of Jesus was fully realized in our hearts, what would characterize our life together as a church?

Pray

1. Prayers of repentance.
2. Ask for the courage to deal decisively, being secure in God’s love and grace, with what the Holy Spirit may continue to reveal to us.
3. Pray for Redeemer to increasingly become a community of love, truth and beauty.

FOR THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE CITY

In Genesis 18 Abraham prays fervently and repeatedly for God to spare (literally *save*) the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In Jeremiah 29 God calls his people to pray for the peace (*shalom*) of Babylon. These were violent, pagan societies, yet God's people were called to pray for God's glory to be revealed to them. So, lastly, corporate prayer renewal in New York City must be prayer *for* New York City. *We are to pray for the glory of God to be seen.* That is a major theme of the Psalms. God's glory is his *weight*, his *importance*, his *reality*. Many people in our cities believe in a God, but not in a God of glory. One of the best ways to pray this way is to walk through a neighborhood and pray for it.

This kind of prayer can also involve praying for a people group. Here are just a few examples:

1. the homeless
2. single parent families
3. prisoners, the crime community (organized and otherwise), and the illegal drug industry of New York
4. the pornography, prostitution, and sex industries of New York (especially runaways caught in prostitution and sexual slavery)
5. people with AIDS
6. wealthy Upper East Side and Midtown East "blue bloods"
7. the gay and lesbian community
8. the Jewish community
9. the colleges and university communities
10. the business and financial community
11. the theater and entertainment community
12. the news media
13. the artist and music community
14. the poor neighborhoods of Harlem, the South Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens
15. the Dominican neighborhoods of upper Manhattan
16. the Indian and Pakistani constituencies of Queens
17. the growing Chinese and Korean communities in Queens
18. the Middle Eastern/Arabic community of Brooklyn
19. the "newer" Latinos from Mexico and Central and South America
20. the elderly in nursing homes.

Discuss

1. **Is there a particular neighborhood, people group, or industry in the city that members of your group would be willing to pray about for a season (e.g., three months)? Don't limit yourselves to the list above. You might also consider praying for the church service your group attends, a specific Redeemer ministry, or one of Redeemer's church plants in the city or elsewhere in the world.**

Pray

1. **For God's Spirit to create a genuine desire to pray for some aspect of the city or world.**
2. **For discernment of what kingdom-centered prayer commitment the Spirit could be leading you towards. (Remember, you are not randomly placed together!)**

¹ Harry Stout and Nathan O. Hatch, Eds., *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 22, Sermons and Discourses 1739-1742* (New Haven: Yale, 2003).

² William R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody* (Albany, Ore.: Book for the Ages, Ages Software, 1997), 127.

³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 14.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, The Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 19.

⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1987).

{ Corporate Prayer 3 }

Prayer

Three Principles of Kingdom-centered Prayer

Study 3

REVIEW

What is spiritual renewal?

Spiritual revival or renewal is a work of God in which the church is beautified and empowered because the *normal* operations of the Holy Spirit are intensified. The normal operations of the Spirit include: conviction of sin, enjoyment and assurance of grace and the Father's love, access to God's presence, and creation of deep community and loving relationships.

How does spiritual renewal come?

One factor *always* seems to be present in every revival. It is **intense, corporate prayer** especially in the face of a specific challenge. This prayer is not so much for personal needs, but for the glory of God and the beauty, palpable presence, and visible reality of God among his people. This is a prayer that the world would be awed and amazed by the evidence of God's power and radiance in the church, as it truly becomes the new humanity that is a sign of the future kingdom. Christians are generally much better at personal prayer than corporate prayer. But in times of revival this corporate renewal prayer is always a major factor in how God works.

The focus of kingdom-centered prayer?

Kingdom-centered prayer calls us to put aside our requests for personal gain and comfort. Instead, we pray for God's Spirit in our hearts, God's presence among us, and the glory of God in the city.

In this third study, we will examine three principles or characteristics of effective kingdom-centered prayer. It is (1) extraordinary, (2) prevailing, and (3) repentant.

First Principle: EXTRAORDINARY PRAYER

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. (Ex. 33:7)

In Exodus 33, the golden calf incident has just occurred. The relationship between God and his people has been damaged. Moses now sets up a tabernacle *outside* the camp. It is important to recognize that this is not the tabernacle that was eventually built to be a mobile temple for Israel, set in the midst of the camp. Rather, this was a simple tent where anyone might go to pray and meet God. However, it was set up outside the camp, probably as a reminder that Israel had a lot of repenting to do before God would again be in

their midst. Those who wanted to seek God's face had to go out of their way to do so, disrupting their normal routines.

Moses was moved by God to create this space to pray for the presence of God. Eventually others felt the burden to seek God as well. All indications are, however, that very few did so at first. For a good while, it may have been just Moses.

What do we learn? It is interesting to see that revivals usually start with a very small group of people—sometimes just one person—who begin to pray for God's glory in the community. Usually it is just a handful of people; always it is some kind of "extraordinary" prayer beyond the normal services and patterns of prayer.

Case study: Western Hemisphere

Jeremiah Calvin Lanphier was a layman in the North Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street in New York. He decided to hold a prayer meeting at noon on Wednesdays for businessmen who worked in the immediate neighborhood. The first meeting was held on September 23, 1857. The first person to join Lanphier was half an hour late; several others came even later. But the meeting quickly grew, and one month later they decided to meet daily. Within months, newspapers estimated that 10,000 were gathering every noon to pray. By May 1858, about 50,000 *new* people had joined the churches, out of a city population of roughly 800,000. It started with one man, and then a small group, who wanted to pray.

Case study: Eastern Hemisphere

In 1900, Christianity in Korea was still a miniscule—0.04 percent of the population. But in 1903 in the city of Wonsan, there was a Canadian missionary, R. A. Hardie, who was doing some biblical research on the subject of prayer. He came upon Luke 11:13: "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!" He was deeply convicted that his missionary work had been motivated by a desire to prove himself to others and God; that he had not based it on grace, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Instead of faith in Christ's justification, he was seeking to justify himself, and this had led to a lack of joy, prayer, and power. He gave this testimony to a Korean congregation, publicly repenting of his pride, hardness of heart, and lack of faith in Christ. This was electrifying in a largely Confucian culture where losing face was considered unthinkable. The people began to repent, pray, and seek the Holy Spirit in their midst. Awakening spread in and around the region of Wonsan and the churches began to grow.

In 1906, in the wake of this renewal, a Korean student by the name of Sun Joo Kil organized the first early morning prayer meeting, which met at 4:30 a.m.

This custom, as well as the all night prayer vigil, became vital to the spiritual life of the Korean churches. But at first it was exceptional and extraordinary. It was “going outside the camp.”

Finally, at a Bible conference meeting on January 17, 1907 in the city of Pyongyang, 1,500 (a huge crowd for the time) gathered. The preacher concluded the sermon and called for prayer, encouraging them to pray aloud if they wished.

The whole audience began to pray out loud and in unison. Suddenly they burst into a roar of prayer as people were feeling a strong urge to prayer. The prayer that sounded like the falling of many waters captivated the whole congregation. William Blair, a Presbyterian missionary, was present and later described the scene: “The whole audience would break out into audible prayer, and the effect of that audience of hundreds of men praying together in audible prayer was something indescribable. Again, after another confession, they would break out into uncontrollable weeping and we would all weep together. We couldn’t help it. And so the meeting went on until 2 a.m., with confession and weeping and praying. ...We had prayed to God for an outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon the people and it had come.”¹

For the rest of the week, most evening services were just as powerful. William Blair says that after the week was over:

The Christians returned to their homes, taking the Pentecostal fire with them. It spread to practically every church. Schools canceled classes for days while students wept out their wrong doings together. We had our hearts torn again and again by the return of little articles and money that had been taken from us over the years. All through the city people were going from house to house, confessing wrongs, returning stolen property, not only to Christians but to heathens. A Chinese merchant was astounded to have a Christian walk in and pay him a large sum of money he had obtained unjustly years before. The whole city was stirred. The cry went out over the city until the heathen were in consternation.²

This began the long march of Christianity through Korean society and culture over the last 100 years. Today Christians comprise nearly fifty percent of the population.

This phenomenon should not be dismissed as mere emotionalism or pietism. Harvie Conn, a missionary to Korea for many years, explained that this revival was a culture-changing “power encounter” of the first order. Conn writes that Confucianism made an idol out of hierarchical authority and was therefore deeply self-righteous. This led to the belief that no one of any real stature should repent. It represented a loss of face. But the gospel brought about a power encounter with the self-righteousness of the Confucian world-view at the heart of Korean culture. A new concept of humility and greatness in the gospel brought about an enormous shift in the lives of converts. In the revival, males especially, who had next to no ability to deal with shame and failure, experienced the love of God in the gospel through the Holy Spirit. It freed them to admit their flaws.³

Summary

What is the lesson? D. M. Lloyd-Jones says that revivals start when “we... set up this tent somehow, somewhere outside the ordinary. We have to go out of our way. Now, this is the question that I want to impress upon your minds... Are you just content with coming to services... and doing some routine things? [Or] have you felt that... you are called to do something exceptional [in prayer], to go out, as it were, to take some deliberate action, that in a way separates you? ... No revival that has ever been experienced in the long history of the Church has ever been an official movement in the Church. ...Believe me, my friends, when the next revival comes, it will come as a surprise to everybody, and especially to those who have been trying to organize it.” ⁴

Discuss

**1. What would extraordinary, non-routine prayer look like in your life?
How would you go about doing it?**

2. What might extraordinary prayer look like at Redeemer, if it became widespread?

3. What are you willing to do outside of your routine to pray for a renewal at Redeemer? What is your group willing to do?

Pray

1. That you and your group will be moved to begin some kind of “extraordinary prayer” for the church. This could be new prayer meetings that could be quite “off the radar” or it could be many individuals setting daily or weekly time aside to pray as “watchmen.”

Second principle: PREVAILING PRAYER

I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth. (Isaiah 62:6-7)

Isaiah sees all history as a tale of two cities. He understands that “the city of man” is a social order built on human self-salvation and self-glorification, and the “city of God” is a social order built upon God. That city—often called Jerusalem, Zion, “God’s mountain,” or “the strong city”—is the people of God on earth, an alternate human society. Isaiah is praying that God will so beautify the people of God with his presence that the world will see it and praise God. This is a prayer for glory and revival. The “watchmen” here are those who, like Isaiah, are praying for this.

What is startling here is Isaiah’s call to “give yourselves no rest, and give *him* no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.” The language seems too bold. But it fits with a very similar message from Jesus himself, in which he tells the parable of a woman who nags and bothers a judge to give her justice—and then says that we should cry out to God in prayer as well! (Luke 18:1-8). It also fits the way the psalmists often pray. They pray over and over. They remind God about his promises; they keep telling him about what he has done and what he says he will do. As Lloyd-Jones so vividly says it, “Give him no rest, give yourself no rest. Keep on. Bombard God. Bombard heaven until the answers come.”⁵ These words are startling when you realize that Lloyd-Jones was a very traditional, conservative man and a staunch Calvinist. But he knew the Bible—he knew its language and its spirit, and he calls us to pray as the Bible calls us to pray.

Consider Abraham praying for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16-33). These cities were incredibly wicked and violent, yet Abraham prays to God to spare them over and over and over. “Will you spare them for fifty righteous?” “All right,” says God. “How about forty? Thirty? Twenty?” Consider Moses on the mountain, praying to see God’s glory (Ex. 33-34.) God says, “I’ll give you this much.” Moses says, “I want more.” God says, “All right, this much.” Moses says, “I want even more.”

Perhaps the most vivid example is Jacob. In Genesis 32, he wrestles with a mysterious stranger in the middle of the night. Eventually he realizes that he is wrestling with God. God says, “Let me go,” and Jacob says, “Not until you bless me.” And so God does. Here we have the same thing we see in Abraham, Moses, the Psalms, Isaiah 62, and Luke 18. God, who obviously does not need us to pray in order to carry out his will, who does not need reminding and repetition, nonetheless wants us to pray in a sustained, prevailing way. Why?

Jonathan Edwards on the Blessing of God

Jonathan Edwards has a remarkable sermon⁶ on Genesis 32:26-29 entitled, "The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us." Here is a summary of his argument.

This duty is *not* to press God repeatedly because we believe we deserve it. Often, sustained, prevailing prayer is motivated by a sense of that we have merited what we ask for because of a good life. We say, "I will hold you to your obligation! I've served you—now you serve me!"

It is *not* to press God repeatedly because we are simply desperate out of inordinate desire. When our good things become ultimate things, we lose all inner contentment. There are some things that become so non-negotiable to us that we can't imagine going on if we don't have them. So we prevail in prayer out of pure anxiety and fear.

This duty *is* to press God in prayer because he calls on us to do it. This is the way he wants us to seek him and his good things.

But why does God want us to do it this way? Edwards posits the following reasons. First, God wants us to do it this way so that our hearts lose their self-sufficiency. Only if we pray in a sustained way do we come to a deep recognition of our utter dependence on God. If God's blessings came upon us without a lot of prayer, we would be hard-hearted and proud, assuming that a good and comfortable life is simply "the right of all sensible folk." It would blind us to our true condition of weakness. This is why Romans 1 says that the worst thing God can do to a rebellious heart is "give them up to their desires"—i.e., give them what they want without prayer! That is what leads people to be blind to their need for God.

Second, God wants us to do it so that our hearts will be prepared to rejoice in God as the author of all blessings. If God's blessings just came upon us without a lot of prayer, we would not perceive him as the source of everything we need. When we don't pray, we are robbing ourselves of our joy. We are blinding ourselves to the graciousness and goodness of God. When the blessing comes, we will not be filled with gratitude—the only proper stance of the human heart toward God and life itself. The prayer-saturated life finds delight in the most mundane things—normal health, income, family life, relationships. They all appear to the heart to be what they truly are—amazing gifts of grace! Without a prayer-saturated life, however, our eyes are blinded to the wonder of the simple things we have from God.

Third, when we do prevailing prayer *corporately*, then the attainment of blessings creates community, knitting our hearts together. When we pray together for some individual's blessing, that person feels a support and solidarity that cannot be given in any other way. When we pray together for our church, it unites us and makes us look to God instead of blaming others for any flaws in the church's life.

In short, God calls us to do prevailing prayer because he knows that it is very dangerous to give us very many good things unless our hearts and spiritual vision are prepared through lots of prayer.

Summary

What is the lesson? Again, a word from Lloyd-Jones:

I commend to you the reading of biographies of those who have been used by God in the Church throughout the centuries, especially in revival. And you will find this same holy boldness, this argumentation, this reasoning, this putting the case to God, pleading his own promises. Oh, that is the whole secret of prayer, I sometimes think. Thomas Goodwin... uses a wonderful term. He says, "Sue him for it, sue him for it." Do not leave him alone. Pester him, as it were, with his own promise... Quote the Scripture to him. And, you know, God delights to hear us doing it, as a father likes to see this element in his own child, who has obviously been listening to what his father has been saying. ⁷

Discuss

- 1. How might sustained or prevailing prayer shape your relationship with God? How would it shape your response to the prayer's answer?**
- 2. What are some correct attitudes for petitioning God? What are some incorrect attitudes?**
- 3. Discuss some of the times you have petitioned God over a long period. Explore your attitude, God's answer, and its impact on your knowledge of yourself and of God.**

4. **What would it be like if your group steadfastly petitioned God in an extraordinary way? What would it be like if all of Redeemer did this?**

5. **Individually and as a group, what do you believe you should petition God for? How would you make this prayer extraordinary and non-routine?**

Pray

1. **That we would, individually and as a church, begin to experience the increasing fruit of increasingly prevailing prayer: a humble dependence on God instead of pride; a joy and delight in almost every good thing we have, even mundane things; a loving unity and a lack of “murmuring and complaining” in our church.**

Third Principle: REPENTANT PRAYER

Kingdom-centered prayer also calls us to a corporate repentance and longing for God. It is characterized by repentance over our lack of love, joy, zeal for the lost, hunger for God and so on. Every church has corporate sins, so this must be done wisely. That is, it must be accompanied by (and based on) enormous hope! We have hope in the gospel that God can do mighty things in our midst.

Renewal begins always with a deeper conviction of sin and proceeds to a concomitant wonder and enjoyment of grace and love. The deeper one feels his or her sin-debt, the more highly he feels the wonder of the payment. As John Newton wrote, "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved."

A repentance that is gospel-based is essential. Without an orientation to the gospel, our hearts will repent out of fear of the consequences and God's rejection. But the gospel leads us to repent *because* Jesus died for our sins so we would *not* be rejected. Legalistic remorse says, "I broke God's rules," while real repentance says, "I broke God's heart."

The gospel creates the only kind of grief over sin that is clean and does not crush. It says, "Look at Jesus dying for you! He won't leave you or abandon you—how then can you respond as you are? You are not living as though you are loved. How can you live in the very sin that he was ripped to pieces to deliver you from?" The grace of God creates the only motivation that leads you to hate the sin without hating yourself. It is the only motivation that will cause sin to lose its attractive power over you.

Christ dying for you is the one thing in the world that most convicts you to be holy *and yet* most assures you that you are infallibly loved. If he *died* for you, that is the conviction. But if he died for *you*, that is the comfort. We are convicted because we know that our sin is the height of ingratitude for his blood.

A gospel-based repentance also enables individuals and churches to face their self-righteousness, those forms of the flesh that are the roots of sinful behavior. We come to understand that we should not only repent of our sins, but also of our "righteousness"—our alternative "salvations" that make us believe we do not need the cross. These forms of "righteousness" may include good works, spiritual disciplines, and orthodox theology along with things like power, success, and the approval of others. What these things have in common is that we place our confidence in them to make us acceptable, instead of placing our trust in the cross of Christ. Thus gospel repentance is a repentance that turns from self-sufficiency, self-confidence, self-righteousness and the fears and insecurities that result. Repentance sees them for what they are—a proud refusal to accept the Father's love, which is free through Christ. Repentance that brings life says to our prides, false securities, fears, anxieties, and bitterness, "This is not my peace! This is not my salvation! This will not control me! I see it for the false god it is!"

Six marks of repentance

Thomas Watson identified six characteristics of real repentance, based closely on Psalm 51.⁸ These characteristics can provide the template for our prayers.

1. *Sight*. "My sin is always before me" (v. 3). No one can truly repent without the Holy Spirit enabling us to see the reality of our sin.
2. *Sorrow*. "Against you, you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight" (v. 4a). Repentance involves genuine sorrow over sin, the way it has grieved God, and what it has cost him. False repentance is sorrow over the consequences of sin, the way it has grieved you, and what it has cost you. Self-pity may appear to be repentance, but it is not.
3. *Responsibility*. "You are proved right when you speak, and justified when you judge" (v. 4b). Real repentance makes no excuses, shifts no blame, takes full responsibility, and readily accepts any consequences without complaint. This is true confession—agreeing with the judge.
4. *Humility*. "Surely I was sinful at birth..." (v. 5). In real repentance there is a change in one's whole attitude towards oneself. You become dependent on God and others. The myth of self-sufficiency is shattered.
5. *Hatred*. "What is *evil* in your sight" (v. 4). If there has been real sorrow for sin (and not just its consequences) you will come to hate the sin itself. Watson says it is to unmask our sin and to see it as the "most misshapen monster" that it is.
6. *Change*. "Grant me a willing spirit" (v. 12). If the other five elements are present, you will forsake the sin. Its power over you will be weakened and you will at least make progress out of it.

Corporate repentance is powerful. It should usually be done in conjunction with setting concrete plans for change and outreach so that its power can be lived out in the life of the church. Prayer meetings should also combine repentance with keeping accounts of answered prayer, new conversions, and other victories, in light of 2 Corinthians 7's discussion of the dangers of falling into remorse and regret, rather than repentance that brings zeal.

Summary

What is the lesson? Gospel-based repentance enables us to face our sins *and* our "righteousness"—those things we hope will bring us life and acceptance apart from the cross of Christ. But our prayers of repentance always move us beyond our sin to our forgiveness in Christ and the hope it brings. Repentance moves us toward God, not away from him, when we discover our sin.

This enables churches to face corporate sins with humility and hope, and the confidence that God's power will lead them to change, the true fruit of repentance. It delivers the church from the spiritual inertia described by Richard Lovelace:

It is... not surprising that many congregations which are full of regenerate people are nevertheless not very alive spiritually, since spiritual life demands *metanoia*, a new mind of repentance, and this requires more than an initial setting of the heart against the shallow expressions of sin which the believer is aware of at the time of conversion... Most congregations of professing Christians today are saturated with [what the Puritans would call] dead goodness, an ethical respectability which has its motivational roots in the flesh rather than in the illuminating and enlivening control of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul describes this... as a form of godliness which denies its power.⁹

Discuss

1. How does a gospel perspective expand your view of what we should repent?
2. How does a gospel perspective address some common fears about what repentance involves?
3. What spiritual counterfeits to repentance have you experienced? What impact did they have on your life?

4. How can we know that our prayers of repentance are in line with God's intentions?

Pray

1. Think of an area in your personal life where God has convicted you of sin. Use Thomas Watson's six characteristics to pray a prayer of repentance.

2. Do the same for Redeemer as a congregation. Pray also that your prayers would be filled with gospel hope, rather than despair or self-righteousness.

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- ¹ Young-Hoon Lee, "Korean Pentecost: The Great Revival of 1907," *Asia Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, April 1, 2001.
- ² William Blair and Bruce Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost and the Sufferings Which Followed* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977).
- ³ Harvie Conn, "Conversion and Culture: A Theological Perspective with Reference to Korea" in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, John R. W. Stott and Robert Coote, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 158.
- ⁴ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1987), 169-170, 166.
- ⁵ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 261.
- ⁶ Michael D. McMullen, *The Blessing of God: Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (Nashville: Broadman, 2003).
- ⁷ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 197.
- ⁸ Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1987) Reprint.
- ⁹ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 109, 92.

Prayer

{ Personal prayer 1 }

Heart-at-rest Prayer

Study 4

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray ...to be seen by men. ...But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’” (Matt 6:5-13)

The importance of personal prayer

The one factor always present in revival is intense, corporate prayer—not so much for personal needs, but for the glory of God and the coming of his kingdom. Nevertheless, the corporate prayer life of a church must be grounded in the healthy, regular, personal prayer of its individual people.

When we examine the Matthew 6 passage, we see that God does want “secret,” private prayer. The word “room” refers to an inner room—a storeroom in the inner part of the house, a room without windows. The issue here is motivation. Jesus is concerned about people who are regular at corporate prayer and corporate worship but have no private prayer lives. A. H. McNeile wrote about this verse, “The secret of religion is religion in secret.” He means that private prayer is the one thing you do when no one is watching, and therefore you won’t do it out of duty or because you are caught up in excitement or peer pressure. No one really sees your private prayer life—so there is almost no accountability for it. It is one of the key indicators that your Christianity is inner and true and not just the product of your environment.

Jesus’ teaching here is that the only “reward” for secret prayer is a relationship with God—God himself is the “reward”—while corporate worship may have other rewards, such as applause, social support, reputation, and so on. Archbishop William Temple went a bit deeper on this subject when he said, “Your religion is what you do with your solitude.” It is a searching question—when you have time all to yourself, when you don’t have to think of anything, where does your mind most effortlessly go? What do you enjoy daydreaming about, what do you think about in your inner sanctum? That, Temple argues, is your real god, your real faith, the thing that has captured your heart and imagination. If you instinctively pray when you have time, you can know that your heart is beginning to rest in God as the reward or ultimate prize of your life.

The nature of personal prayer

Personal prayer can be carried out in such a way that it orients the believer toward outward-focused, kingdom-centered, corporate prayer. The Lord’s Prayer shows us how.

The Lord's Prayer sets out two goals for petitionary personal prayer: first, to put the world right—"thy kingdom come"—and second, to put your heart at rest—"thy will be done." Eugene Peterson, in *Answering God*,¹ his great book on praying the Psalms, points out how Psalm 4 (an evening prayer, oriented toward accepting and reflecting) comes before Psalm 5 (a morning prayer, oriented toward asking and action).

The first purpose is *external*. Through our petitions, God says we affect the circumstances of history (James 5:16b-18). He will work justice in the world through our prayers (Luke 18:7-8). There are many things he says he will not give until we ask (James 4:2b). When we do ask, he will give us above and beyond what we have asked for (Eph. 3:20). He will begrudge us no good thing we ask for (James 1:5). Yet we also see that the second purpose of petitionary prayer is *internal*. Through our petitions, we receive peace and rest. Just as physical sleep is a giving up of control to become physically vulnerable, so petition is a giving up of control to become emotionally and spiritually vulnerable—a resting and trusting in God to care for our needs.

Heart-at-rest prayer

In the evening, David is trying to put his heart at rest so he can put his body at rest.

Psalm 4

- ¹ Answer me when I call to you,
O my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
be merciful to me and hear my prayer.
- ² How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame?
How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?
- ³ Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD will hear when I call to him.
- ⁴ In your anger do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent.
- ⁵ Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD.
- ⁶ Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?"
Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.
- ⁷ You have filled my heart with greater joy
than when their grain and new wine abound.
- ⁸ I will lie down and sleep in peace,
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

In the last verse David achieves the goal of an evening prayer. “I will lie down and sleep *in peace*.” It is not a statement of triumph to say, “I will lie down and sleep.” That is not something we can avoid! Sleep will finally overtake us; we can’t help it. But the purpose of evening prayer is seen in the phrase “in peace.” As Peterson says, evening prayer aims to give the soul the same “peace” and restoration that the body will get in a night’s sleep. Of course, doctors will tell us that the soul and the body always rest better if they do it together! A troubled soul will lead to fitful sleep, and the body won’t fully get what it needs.

Regular evening prayer is important, therefore, for both our physical and spiritual health. It is not primarily a prayer of praise or repentance (though true petition can never be separated from them). It is primarily a prayer of petition in which the needs and concerns that burden us are prayed into the hands of God so that our soul does not go weighted down into the night’s sleep.

How does David get his heart at rest? We see here a form of “self-communing” or meditation. He is working on his own heart—he is not speaking to God in the middle of this prayer, but to himself. He is meditating; he is giving himself critique and counsel, and working truth into his heart. That explains why, when he is done with counseling, his own heart has changed from the clamor of verse 1 to the quiet of verse 8. In short, David is “preaching to himself,” which progressively enables him to unburden himself and put his needs in God’s hands.

David’s ultimate counsel to himself begins in verse 6b: “the light of your face... upon us.” Verse 7 is then a remarkably powerful statement. “If I have the privileges of the gospel—an assurance of and access to the love, grace, and friendship of God, then everything else is ‘gravy.’” Years ago, the young Jonathan Edwards wrote a sermon ² with the following outline:

1. Our bad things will turn out for good. (Rom. 8:28)
2. Our good things can never be taken away from us. (Ps. 4:6-7)
3. And the best things are yet to come. (1 Cor. 2:9)

David tells us here that our petitions may be defiled by self-pity if they are not accompanied by praise and thanksgiving for the miraculous, permanent blessings of salvation itself. We are to be amazed at our access to God (“light of your face”) and the “joy” of knowing we belong to God. It is not until we put our temporal needs in perspective with the glory given and guaranteed that we will be able to ask God for things without getting ourselves deeper into worry and self-pity.

If, as we lay our requests before God, we find ourselves sinking deeper into despondency, anger, or self-pity, it is because we have failed to really do this kind of heart work. We must: (1) be sure that the things we are asking for aren't idols, or else our petition only will make us more discouraged; (2) be sure the things we are asking for are not enhancing our anger and sense of superiority over others, or else our petition will make us only more bitter, and (3) be sure that when we ask for things, we also spend time rejoicing and thanking God for what we already have and cannot lose in the gospel.

1. What do you do with your “down” time? What do you gain in that time? How often are you led to pray in these intervals? What does spending time with God provide for you versus these other activities? (If you have no “down” time, what is preventing that?)

2. What kinds of things keep you up at night? How do you deal with them? How could you use prayer to address these “night terrors”?

3. How could you make time for ten to fifteen minutes of heart-at-rest prayer most evenings?

4. God says that he will deny us no good thing. What are good things from God's perspective?

5. What would a right-minded prayer look like? What would it include? What would it exclude?

Apply

Commit yourself to doing heart-at-rest prayer during the next week. Set a reasonable goal, (such as three times during the week, ten minutes a night). Be alert to any changes in your ability to sleep restfully, in your attitudes towards problems, etc. Be prepared to discuss your experiences with your group next week.

1. Pray for the establishment of daily morning and evening prayer times in each person's life, and for steadfastness and fruitfulness in those times.

- ¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 61.
- ² Author's paraphrase of Jonathan Edwards's first sermon, "Christian Happiness" in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 10*, Wilson Kimnach, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

Prayer

{ Personal prayer 2 }

Change-the-world Prayer

Study 5

Review

Why is a personal prayer life important?

What are the two goals of petitionary prayer?

What is heart-at-rest prayer?

Discuss what you learned doing heart-at-rest prayer last week.

In the morning in Psalm 5, David is getting himself ready for eager, aggressive activity.

Psalm 5

- ¹ Give ear to my words, O LORD,
consider my sighing.
- ² Listen to my cry for help,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.
- ³ In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait in expectation.
- ⁴ You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil;
with you the wicked cannot dwell...
- ⁷ But I, by your great mercy,
will come into your house;
in reverence will I bow down
toward your holy temple.
- ⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies —
make straight your way before me...
- ¹¹ Let all who take refuge in you be glad;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may rejoice in you.

The first thing we notice in David's change-the-world prayer is a *spontaneous but disciplined* balance in his method. In verse 1, David calls attention to the "sighing" of the heart. His petitions are the deepest fears, hopes, concerns, and longings of his heart. They are spontaneous cries. But in verse 3, he "lays" his requests before God in an orderly and systematic fashion. This is an important balance. On the one hand, it means we are to take a very careful inventory of everything weighing on our heart—making our hearts "sigh." We should turn every sigh into a prayer. Otherwise, we will go through the day

sinking under the weight of self-absorption, anxiety, self-pity, or anger. I have found that I need to get my prayer list from my heart.

At the same time, however, it is not enough to just know the heart's concerns. We have to distill them and deal with them in specific, orderly, regular (every morning!) petition. In short, petition must be characterized by both ardor and order. We need to discover our own hearts' deepest sighs, and then take the time and trouble to pray them in a disciplined way.

Second, we see an *active-passive* balance in attitude. This comes out in the term "wait in expectation" (v.3) or, as it is sometimes translated, "watch." To "watch" or "wait in expectation" shows first an active, eager, hopeful attitude. We move out in confidence. We are not fearful, second-guessing, or looking over our shoulder. Yet "watch" and "wait" also mean that we are restraining ourselves from trying to answer God's prayers for him. We relax and allow him to act. We do not take revenge, we do not overwork, we do not cut corners. We rest in the knowledge of his active care for us.

How does David get his heart into eager expectation? He seems to have confidence that God will hear his petitions. David had his reasons—his experience with God, and the revelations of the Spirit of God in his heart. But, believe it or not, we have even greater resources for our assurance that God will hear our petitions.

We know that God will answer us when we call (v.1) because on one terrible day, he did *not* answer Jesus when *he* called. Jesus called out to "my God," but he was forsaken (Matt. 27:46). Jesus' suffering and rejection were endured on our behalf. Jesus was our substitute (2 Cor. 5:21). We are the ones who deserve to be forsaken and to have our prayers rejected. Why? Because he is a "righteous God" (v.1). Without Christ, verse 1 is rather unnerving. To call upon a righteous God for an answer, when we ourselves are so flawed, is a mistake. The psalmist says, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18). But who can say that they do *not* nurture sin in their hearts?

Jesus was given the prayer-rejection that we deserved, so that we could have the prayer-reception that he deserved (2 Cor. 5:21). We know that God will answer us when we call "my God" because God did not answer Jesus when he made the same petition on the cross. Now, the righteousness of God guarantees that he will answer us. God *must* hear us, or he would be unjust. Our sins are paid for. Without Christ, God's righteousness would guarantee that he not hear us. With Christ, God's righteousness guarantees that he will!

This is, perhaps, the ultimate way that petition unburdens the heart—when it is combined with the gospel. David knew intuitively that God would answer him, though in Psalm 4:5 he remembers that God will only answer him if he "offers right sacrifices." The temple was a place to offer sacrifices to cover sin, but we

know that Jesus offered the ultimate sacrifice. Therefore, when we remember Christ's sacrifice and our acceptance in him, we are assured that our petitions will be heard—and answered in the wisest way. If God turns down our requests, it is not because we are "unworthy." It is only because our request wasn't the wisest.

Jesus told us to pray "Our Father" to remind us right up front that we go to God as his loved children, adopted into the family. Because we are *his* children, we know that God wants to answer us; he is committed to us. But because we are his *children*, we know that we have little wisdom and may not always ask for the wisest thing. What we have is the assurance that God will always give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything he knows. This is all part of the assurance we have that goes deeper than David's. How much better should we sleep at night than he did! Do we?

Peterson summarizes:

Psalm 4, an evening prayer, and Psalm 5, a morning prayer, are strategically placed by our prayer masters early in [the Psalter] to establish these fundamental rhythms in our lives and get us praying in the cadence of God's word... [which] is now integrated into the rhythm of going to sleep and waking up. ...We never arrive at a condition where we are beyond sleep, self-sufficient in twenty-four hour control. Daily we... [submit] ourselves to that which is deeper than consciousness in order to grow and be healed. [Now, in prayer] we [sink] into the quiet rhythms of God's creating and covenanting words. ...Evening prayer is a deliberate act of spirit that cultivates willingly what our bodies force on us finally. ...Psalm 5 prays our reentry into the waking world's daylight. ...Morning prayer prepares for action. Passivity, in which we let God work his will in us [as in the evening Psalm 4] is primary, but activity, in which we obey the will worked in us in the world, is also essential. ¹

Summary

1. The qualities of petitionary prayer are boldness, specificity, ardor, discipline, yet submission to God's will and wisdom.
2. Other types of prayer that accompany petition: (a) repentance for idols—so we are not too despondent to pray, (b) forgiveness of wrongdoers—so we are not too angry to pray, and (c) gratitude and praise for grace in the gospel—so we are not too self-pitying to pray.
3. The basic assurance for petitionary prayer: we get the prayer-reception Jesus deserved because he got the prayer-rejection we deserved. We can pray with boldness and submissiveness because we know we are his children.

1. When you are faced with a pressing issue, how do you deal with it? What priority does prayer have in preparing you for the challenges of this issue? What do you think petition to God each morning does for you?

- 4. How do we grow in wisdom to know what to pray for? And in our ability to see the answers?**

1. Make a list of the issues you expect to deal with this coming week.

- 45

1. Pray as a group for the establishment of daily morning and evening prayer times in each of your lives, and for steadfastness and fruitfulness in those times.

- 2. Pray for patience and alertness in waiting for God's answers to your prayers.**
- 3. Pray for increased wisdom and joy in your prayers.**

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God*, 61-64.

Prayer

{ Personal prayer 3 }

A Plan for Daily Prayer

Study 6

Review

What is heart-at-rest prayer?

What is change-the-world prayer?

How are these two approaches to prayer used?

Discuss your experiences with prayer last week. Take a moment to praise God for what he revealed about his character to different members of the group.

This study will present a plan for daily prayer that has been very helpful in my own devotional times. The “secret” (if that is the right term) to composing these prayers is the discipline of a practice of meditation between Bible reading and prayer, and the expectation of a final practice (contemplation).

STEP 1: BIBLE READING

The first step in this approach is a measured reading of the Bible with the goal of understanding its truth. Take a passage from the Bible, such as Psalm 1, Psalm 23, Psalm 19:7-14 or Psalm 32. First, slowly read a paragraph two or three times, inviting the Holy Spirit to reveal truth to you. We are going for depth in reading, not quantity of reading.

Next, write down answers to the following questions: (1) List what the passage tells you about God or Christ. (2) List what it tells you about yourself or mankind (for example, examples to follow or avoid, commands to obey, promises to claim). Some are helped by making a chart like this to note your answers.

God / Christ	Mankind / Me

Finally, write down the most compelling truth you learned from the reading. It’s important to write your answers down instead of trying to hold them in your head. Don’t take a shortcut here.

STEP 2: MEDITATION

The next step into deeper prayer is meditation. Meditation is reflecting on God's Word, so that you can sense the reality of the truth in your heart. Do so by answering the following questions about the truth you noted in step 1.

1. How would you be different if this truth was explosively alive in your innermost being?

2. Why is God showing you these particular things today? Jot down a few words to anchor your thoughts.

STEP 3: PRAYER

Now it's time to engage in prayer. In prayer we speak to God, with the goal of seeing God at work in our lives and in the world. Bring the truth you have meditated on in step 2 into your heart by praying it into your inner being.

Many people find the ACTS formula helpful.

Adoration: How can you praise God or Christ for what this passage reveals about him?

Confession: What wrong behavior, harmful emotions, false attitudes result in you when you forget he is like this?

Thanksgiving: How is the grace we have in Jesus the key to help you overcome the sins you just confessed? Thank him for it.

Supplication: What do you need to do or to become in light of this? Ask him for it!

After meditation (or as soon as you become engaged) pray through the ACTS meditations: (1) adore God, (2) repent for sin, (3) give thanks for Christ, and (4) ask for aid. Then (5) move on to "kingdom prayer," in which the soul looks outward toward its challenges in the world. With new clarity of perspective, it wrestles in prayer for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

CONTEMPLATION

Once you've begun to practice reading, meditation, and prayer, pursue contemplation (sensing), which is not so much a fourth element as the fruit of the other three. The goal of contemplation is a heart engagement with the cognitive truth(s) you have been reflecting on. It can be fleeting or sustained, light or pronounced. It can mingle with the other practices or come in strong and displace them. Its essence is an adoring gaze at God. More moderate levels can be described as "sweetness" (Ah!) or "illumination" (Aha!). Stronger experiences have the following traits: (1) there is a sense of the reality of God's presence, (2) the soul receives strong assurance that it belongs to God, (3) it can be indescribable (!) (4) it may be physically affecting at the time, and (5) it results in permanent changes in the life. (See Psalm 27:1 and Romans 8:15-16.)

Given the nature of contemplation, it isn't appropriate to think in terms of "method" except to say this: Since contemplation is essentially a wordless gazing on and admiration of the Lord, don't be tied down to a particular devotional method if this experience of God comes to you strongly. Luther said, "When the Holy Spirit starts this, break off from your meditation routine. It is clarity-reality, an ability to rest, an ability to delight in his beauty for itself." If it doesn't happen on its own, I would attempt contemplation at the end of every devotional period just by returning to adoration. I simply try to gaze adoringly at what I've seen of God that day, without inner comment. But real contemplation is out of our control.

Getting started

Once you have learned to do this deeper approach to meditative prayer, you will eventually be able to complete this process in a very short time—sometimes even five or ten minutes. Try it with a familiar psalm or passages like these:

Psalm 1
Psalm 19:7-14
Psalm 23
Psalm 32

Group Exercise

As a group, take one of the suggested passages and work through the Read, Meditate and Pray stages together, i.e., steps 1-3, Answer the questions together; perhaps take turns being the "scribe." You are trying to get a hands-on experience of this method for a daily prayer plan. This will help it come more easily to you when you do it on your own.

Apply

As a group, take the remaining three passages to use for your personal prayer times during the coming week, using this plan. Everyone should try to do the plan at least three times during the week. Try to set aside thirty minutes for each devotional time.

At the beginning of your next meeting, each person should share the most powerful truth he or she learned about God and his or her circumstances. Incorporate these truths into group prayer for your worship time together.

1. Pray what you “saw” collectively from the group exercise.

- 3. Pray for the establishment or deepening of daily morning and evening prayer times, not only for your group, but for all of Redeemer.**

Prayer

{ Meditation 1 }

Doorway into Deeper Prayer

Study 7

INTRODUCTION FROM TIM KELLER

Like most people, my devotional time consisted of Bible reading and then prayer. My prayer life changed, however, when I learned of and added a “middle discipline”—meditation—between plain Bible reading and full-out prayer. Meditation is prayer-full reflection on what God has just told you in his Word. It is neither study nor prayer, exactly, but a combination. Psalm 1, which is not a prayer, but a meditation, indicates that meditation is the doorway into deeper prayer. Learn to do meditative prayer, and you will enrich the rest of your prayer life in untold ways.

Psalm 1

- ¹ Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of the mockers.
- ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.
- ⁴ Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
- ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- ⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

1. The object of meditation

The object or basis for meditation is “the law of the Lord,” the Word of God. There are many other things that people may and should meditate upon. But in Psalm 1, the primary concern is meditation on Scripture. Closely associated and involved with meditation is “delighting” in the law of the Lord. If we are honest, we will admit that we do not usually think of the words “delight” and “law” as appearing in the same sentence. But this shows us at least two things about meditation. First, meditation involves *not just the head but the heart*. “*Delight* in the law” is not simply intellectual study, but an internal relishing and cherishing of the truth. In addition, meditation involves *not just thinking abstractly but thinking about our acting*. To delight in the law is to ask not “Do I believe this?” but “What *difference* does it make that I believe this?”

How would I be different if I *really* believed this? How would it change my heart and behavior? How does this apply to me?" "Delight in the *law*" is not simply a matter of noticing truths and principles. You only "delight in the law" if you just love having God tell you what to do!

In his study of Psalm 1, Eugene Peterson brings out the fact that the original meaning of the Hebrew word used here for "law"—*torah*—comes from a verb that means to throw something to hit its mark, as in a javelin.¹ That is highly significant. The Scriptures are not words to simply study for an exam, unlocking information to use as we will. These are energies hurled at our heart. God's words are designed to penetrate, wound, remove, heal, and infuse us! In the New Testament, we read that the Word of God is "alive and active, a sword" (Heb. 4:12). This is quite important practically, because this realization is necessary for meditation—that his word is *torah*—living truth aimed to penetrate us. Sometimes that very thought can spontaneously move us into meditation and prayer.

2. The necessity of meditation

Verses 1 and 2 show that meditation is neither an exclusively intellectual exercise nor an optional one. The life of a godly man in verse 2, based on meditation on God's law, is contrasted with the life of the ungodly man in verse 1. Notice, however, that even an *ungodly* life is also based on some form of "meditation." It begins with "walking in the counsel of the ungodly."

"Counsel" means a form of wisdom and thinking. We will either be meditating and walking in God's wisdom or meditating and walking in worldly human wisdom. What shapes your thinking ("counsel") shapes your behavior ("way") and the attitude of your heart ("scoffers"). Thus we must always consider what we are listening to and meditating on in our heart of hearts. We will naturally meditate on the "counsel of the wicked" or we will deliberately make ourselves meditate on the law of the Lord. There are no other alternatives.

Therefore, we are told to meditate "day and night." In that phrase we hear a call to the consistent, constant discipline of meditation. This is something we decide to do; we don't wait for it to happen. It must happen regularly, relentlessly. It is something you do whether you feel like it or not. Also, as we saw when looking at Psalm 4 and 5, the Psalms assume both morning and evening times of prayer.

- 1. Can you think of a time when you listened to unsound advice? Why did you follow this advice? What were the consequences?**
- 2. Can you think of an instance when you ignored sound guidance? Why did you choose not to follow this advice? What were the consequences?**
- 3. Contrast these examples with the Word of God. What would your expectations be if you followed God's instruction on a matter? What could lead you to ignore God's guidance? How might you guard against choosing poorly?**

A meditation on meditation

One of the most fascinating things about Psalm 1 is the way it actually meditates *on* meditation. Verses 3-5 are an extended consideration of the ways the godly life contrasts with the ungodly life, like a tree contrasts with “chaff.” [Some of us urbanites need to recall that chaff is the seed covering, husk, and other debris that break off and separate from the more valuable grain during threshing. In ancient times, the grain and the chaff were thrown into the air, allowing the wind to blow away the lighter, useless chaff, leaving the heavier grain to fall back to earth and be gathered for planting or food.]

What does this metaphor-contrast tell us? (1) A tree is useful, but chaff is useless. So ungodliness is of no profit. (2) A tree is stable and lasting, while chaff is blown about and blown away. So ungodliness leads to instability and all its gains are temporary. (3) A tree bears fruit, thus giving life to people and growing more trees. Chaff cannot produce any new life. Nor can it even feed anyone; it has no nutritional value. Thus, godliness matures, nurtures, and bears life, while ungodliness leaves you empty, hungry, unsatisfied, and starving.

Verse 3 begins, “He is like.” Who is “he”? The man who meditates on the law day and night (v. 2). Therefore, the tree in verse 3 is an extended metaphor and meditation on the one who meditates. What do we learn? Ironically, as soon as we begin to answer the question, we are beginning to meditate and on our way to making the following discoveries.

1. Meditation takes time, like a tree putting roots down. Trees don’t grow overnight!
2. Meditation leads to depth and stability. The deeper one’s “roots” in meditation, the less likely that a wind storm will blow you over.
3. Meditation is looking at the Word of God like a thirsty tree looks at water. This shows us that meditation goes beyond the intellectual. It is spiritually “tasting” Scripture—delighting in it, sensing its sweetness, thanking and praising God for what you see. It is also spiritually “digesting” Scripture—applying it, thinking about how it affects you, describes you, and guides you in the most practical way. It is also drawing strength from the Scripture—letting it give you hope, using it to remember how loved you are.
4. Meditation will always lead to character growth—to fruit. It is not just a way to feel close to God. Real meditation changes the heart permanently, into a heart of love, joy, peace, patience, humility, and self-control (Gal. 5:22). As Derek Kidner observes, “The tree is no mere channel, piping water unchanged from one place to another, but a living organism which absorbs it, to produce in due course something new and delightful, proper to its kind and to its time.” ²
5. Meditation leads to stability, but not immunity from suffering and dryness. This tree only bears fruit “in season” though “its leaf does not wither.” This means on the one hand that meditation leads to stability. A meditating person is an evergreen!

Yet we must not always expect meditation to lead to uniform experiences of joy and love. There are “seasons” for great delight (springtime blossoms?) and for wisdom and maturity (summer fruit?). It means there are also spiritual winter-times, when we don’t feel God close, though our roots may still be firmly in his truth. Kidner writes, “The promised immunity of the leaf from withering is not independence from the rhythm of the seasons, but freedom from the crippling damage of drought.”³

Only in light of the balance of this metaphor can we understand the last line of verse 3. When the psalmist says, “Whatever he does prospers,” he does not mean that “he reaches every goal” or “he is always successful.” Rather, it means something like this: “A meditating person will always grow! Sometimes it is growth internally through suffering (as in winter) and sometimes it is externally through success (as in springtime). But you will always grow and prosper!”

We learn here that meditation has a lot to do with the imagination. You are trying to get a grasp on how truth really *affects* you. There is no better way than to create an image in your mind, for an image not only helps you make an abstract truth more concrete to your understanding, but also more gripping to your heart. Someone once defined meditation as “the mind descending into the heart.”

The fruit of meditation

First, meditation leads to blessedness! Because there are so many contrasting clauses in this first sentence of the psalm, which stretches across the first two verses, we often miss its point. If we look only at the beginning and the end, it becomes clear. “Blessed is the man who... meditates day and night.” Once we remove all the contrasts and qualifiers, we see the point. If you want “blessedness,” you must meditate. The word “blessed” in Hebrew means far more than just “happy.” It refers to complete peace and fullness of life, total well-being. That is an enormous promise! Our blessedness or lack thereof depends on what we are listening to or meditating on in our heart of hearts.

Second, meditation leads to stability, confidence, and assurance. Verse 5 gives us the chilling interpretation of the “chaff” metaphor. Just as the chaff is blown away by the wind into oblivion, so the wicked will be blown away by the presence of God on judgment day. By way of inference, we are being told that the one who meditates on the law of the Lord can be confident of standing on that day. Verse 6 tells us that the Lord “watches over” us—a word that means he comes close and cares for us. In sum, we will not have to be afraid of what will happen when we stand before God. We can have assurance that we will stand in the judgment.

Discuss

1. Meditating on God's Word prepares us for the good times and the bad times. Unfortunately, "meditating" on other things—focusing our hearts, minds, and energies inordinately on things like work, marriage, family, health, beauty, home, etc.—prepares us very differently for success and adversity. How would an idolatrous focus on such things affect the way you dealt with prosperity? How would it affect the way you experienced failure and disappointment? Could this kind of meditation actually become the source of difficulty in your life?
2. Contrast these idols (i.e., good things that become ultimate things) with the total assurance you have in Jesus' grace and in the perfect love of God. How might meditating on Jesus and God impact your perceptions of the good times? How might this meditation help you in the difficult times?

Apply

Take time to privately list the thing or things that you tend to base your identity upon. These will be the things that seem absolutely essential to your happiness and security, things that you "meditate" on. Next to each item, list the reasons you feel fulfilled by it.

During the coming week, meditate on the following psalms, one each day: Psalm 103, Psalm 23, Psalm 62, Psalm 63 and Psalm 40. As you meditate, write down the difference it would make if you *really* believed this. How would you be different? How would it change your heart and behavior? Use these notes to initiate your prayer time each day. (Bear in mind that this is an abbreviated form of meditation. A fuller development of the exercise of meditation is covered in Personal Prayer, Study 3 and in next week's group exercise.)

At the end of the week compare your meditation notes with the list you made at the end of the group session. Pray about how your heart and life are changing through God's Word and truth.

During your worship time next week, praise God for what you learned about God's character in your meditations.

Pray

Pray together that:

- 1. God's Word would make a difference in how you live.**
- 2. Your hearts would grow to delight in instruction from God.**
- 3. The truths about God would become your reality.**
- 4. You would gain the benefits of meditating on the Word of God: discipline, stability, sustenance, fruit, growth, total well-being and assurance.**

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 25.

² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 48.

³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 48.

Prayer

{ Meditation 2 }

Doorway into Deeper Prayer

Study 8

Review of Part 1

In the previous study, we learned that absorbing the Word of God and desiring his instruction lead to a very different life than one devoted to the things of the world. If we focus on the Word of God and incorporate it into our lives, we will gain personal discipline, stability, sustenance, fruit, growth, total well-being, and complete assurance.

We begin our study once again with Psalm 1.

- ¹ Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of the mockers.
- ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.
- ⁴ Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
- ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- ⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

The necessity of meditation in the light of Christ

How can a life of meditation lead to this kind of confidence and assurance? We who read Psalm 1 in the light of Jesus Christ have a ready answer. Without Jesus and the cross, it is frightening to meditate on “the Lord watches over the way of the righteous” (v.6). Who in the world is righteous enough for God? Without the assurance of Jesus’ death for me and his righteousness imputed to me (2 Cor. 5:21), I will *lose* confidence the more I meditate on Psalm 1 and on the righteousness of God on judgment day. But if I meditate on what Jesus has done for me, I will find my assurance growing. Richard Lovelace writes:

As P. T. Forsyth says, “It is an item of faith that we are children of God; there is plenty of experience in us against it.” The faith that surmounts this evidence and that is able to warm itself at the fire of God’s love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness... “We are not saved by the love we exercise, but by the love we trust.” ¹

When Lovelace speaks of “warming [one]self at the fire of God’s love,” he is describing what it means to meditate on the righteousness we have in Christ because of his sacrificial death. If we don’t meditate on that until our hearts are hot with assurance, we will “steal love and self-acceptance” from worldly achievements, beauty, status, and so on. That is why there are only two paths! We either walk in the counsel of the world—getting our warmth from there and walking in accordance with it (v. 1) or we delight in what the Word tells us about our salvation. If we do verse 2, we will have the confidence of verses 3 and 6.

A Christ-meditation of Psalm 1

How do we meditate on Christ when we meditate on a passage like Psalm 1? We know that Jesus is the one who perfectly fulfilled the law’s requirements for a godly man. He was preeminently a person who delighted in the Word and meditated on it day and night. He is the one who meditated so profoundly on Scripture that he virtually “bled” Scripture, quoting it in the most extreme moments of his life (Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:1). That is how he stood firm like an “evergreen” tree, using the Word of God even when in hell on the cross. Do you want to be able to put up even with hell? Put your roots into Scripture!

Jesus is also, supremely, the one on whom we meditate. Why is his life, especially as depicted in the Gospels, such rewarding “fuel” for meditation? Because he *is* the meditation of God! He is God’s truth become “real,” made concrete and applied. As we saw above, *he* is the one who enables us to stand on judgment day. *He* is the one who puts in us the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). We must both meditate on him and with him, and then, not only will Psalm 1 come to life in new ways, but we will become unshakable trees, as he was.

The relation of meditation to prayer

The Psalms were collected and arranged at a certain point in Israel’s history, and so Psalm 1’s position at the beginning of the Psalms is not an accident. This psalm stands as the gate or doorway into the Psalter, the prayer book of the Bible, and its subject is the doorway into real prayer. It is not itself a prayer. It is what it talks about—a meditation. Now, if the first psalm is about meditation, that is a strong indication that meditation is the necessary preface or preparation to deeper prayer.

Eugene Peterson writes, “Psalm 1 is not prayer, exactly, but the preface to prayer. We do not begin to pray by praying but by coming to attention. Psalm 1 is the biblical preparation for a life of prayer... Most of us can’t step immediately from the noisy high-stimulus world into the quiet concentration of prayer. We need a way of transition. [Meditation] provides a kind of entryway.”²

This is an important discovery. Most of us have a devotional life in which we jump from fairly academic study of the Bible into prayer. But meditation is the middle ground between prayer and Bible study, the bridge between the two. After studying a passage, we need to learn to meditate our hearts hot and yet quiet on the truth of God. That is a doorway into deeper prayer. George Muller provides a case study.

The difference then between my former practice and my present one is this. Formerly, when I arose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer. ...What was the result? I often spent... even an hour on my knees, before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, or humbling of the soul. Often, after having suffered much from wandering thoughts...

I scarcely ever suffer now in this way... I began... to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning... searching, as it were, into every verse to get a blessing out of it.... not for the sake of preaching [to others], but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. ...After a very few minutes my soul had been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication. ...When thus I have been for a while... I go on to the next words or verse, turning all as I go into prayer, ...as the Word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me, that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. ...It often astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point.³

While it is certainly possible for deep experiences of the presence and power of God to happen anywhere, the ordinary way for “going deeper” spiritually is meditation. To get into deeper self-surrender, then into higher, clearer faith sights of God’s beauty, and finally into powerful, dynamic prayer for world, you need to start with meditation.

Some definitions of meditation

Meditation is a hard thing to define exactly, but now we are in a position to try.

From Psalm 1. Meditation on Scripture is pondering, relishing, imagining, applying, and rehearsing God’s truth until it becomes real to the heart and permanently affects your attitude and behavior. It leads to blessedness (v. 1), stability and the ability to grow in all circumstances (vv. 3-4), freedom and independence from the world’s ways (vv. 1-2), confidence and assurance in our relationship to God (vv. 5-6).

From Ephesians 1:17-19. “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”

Meditation is thinking a truth *in* and thinking a truth *out* until the ideas become big and sweet, moving and affecting, and until the reality of God is sensed in the heart.

Finally, meditation is, strictly speaking, neither the Bible nor prayer; rather it is the Bible turning to prayer. Meditation is *Lectio Divina*—"Divine Reading." Meditation is a *formative* reading of the Bible rather than an *informative* reading. Informative reading aims mainly at breaking things down and analyzing them (e.g., "What does this mean? What does this word mean? How does this word affect the rest of the sentence?") Formative reading aims mainly at putting things together, seeing connections (e.g., "That's me!" "What would I be like if I really did this?" "What kind of God would say this?") In informative reading, *you* examine and ask questions of the text. In formative reading, *the text* examines and asks questions of you.

The practice of meditation

Group Exercise

Read together Mark 1:16-18.

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

- 1. Have a brief Bible study together to prepare for meditation and prayer. List the things this passage tells you about God or Jesus. List what it tells you about yourselves. List examples to follow or avoid, commands to obey, and promises to claim.**

2. Now, individually, take a few quiet minutes to decide which insight had the most impact on you personally. Take this insight and write it down in your own words, explaining why it helped you. Next, think about how you would be different if this truth were explosively alive in you. Why is God showing you this truth now? This is meditation—you are taking a particular truth from your head into your heart so that it will make a practical difference in your life.
3. Discuss together your individual meditations. Be brief. Note how differently God applies one passage!
4. Now bring these insights into prayer as a group. In general, go from praise to confession, to thanksgiving, to petition (the ACTS formula).

- 5. As a group, agree on a chapter in the Bible that you will cover during the week in study, meditation, and prayer. Next week, share the insights you each gained.**

¹ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 213.

² Eugene H. Peterson, *Psalms: Prayers of the Heart* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Connect, 1987, 2000), 10.

³ George Muller (1805-1898) was a Christian leader chiefly known for the orphanage he founded and for his spirituality and prayers of faith. From *The George Muller Treasury*, Roger Steer, Ed. (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1987), 64-66.

Prayer

Praise and Adoration

Study 9

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 150 and Psalm 27 instruct us about the praise and adoration of our God. Understanding the why and how of praise and adoration will deepen our prayer lives. The more we sense God's greatness and glory in our hearts, the sweeter the reality of our relationship with him will be.

PRAISE

Psalm 150

- ¹ Praise the LORD.
Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty heavens.
- ² Praise him for his acts of power,
praise him for his surpassing greatness.
- ³ Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,
- ⁴ praise him with tambourine and dancing,
praise him with the strings and flute.
- ⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.
- ⁶ Let everything that has breath
praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD.

Where the Lord is to be praised. In verse 1, we read we are to praise him "in his sanctuary." This evidently refers to temple worshipers here on earth. "In his mighty heavens" probably refers to his worshipers in heaven. In other words, he is to be praised everywhere—in everything. "His glory fills the universe; His praise must do no less." ¹

Why the Lord is to be praised. In verse 2, "His acts of power" refer to everything he does, while "his surpassing greatness" refers to everything he is. This verse covers both his Person and his Work. In other words, he is to be praised comprehensively—for everything.

How the Lord is to be praised. Look at verses 3-5. At first glance, it appears that the psalmist has just given us an arbitrary list of musical instruments, but scholarly commentary on this list is very illuminating.

Various sides of life are touched on in this short list: great national and sacred occasions, by the trumpet blast; ...joyous celebrations, e.g., of a victory, by the timbrel and dance; and simple music-making, to judge by the everyday associations of the pipe or "flute" ...Every kind of instrument—solemn or gay, percussive or melodic, gentle or strident, is rallied here for the praise of God. ²

In other words, he is to be praised resourcefully—with everything.

Who is to praise the Lord. Verse 6 tells us something radical. Some want to limit this phrase to "all humankind," but that seems "unduly narrow"³ in light of Revelation 5:13: "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!'" So verse 6 is saying that "every living creature" will praise God. Why is this so radical? Psalm 19:1-4 tells us that the inanimate creation is telling of the glory of God. Romans 8:19,22 tells us that all creation is "groaning" until it can be liberated into perfect praise of God. What will make the new heavens and new earth glorious and magnificent is that they will praise God as they were designed.

The connection between praise and prayer

It is significant that Psalm 150 is put at the end of the Psalter. Eugene Peterson in *Answering God* helps us to see the true connection between praise and prayer.

All [true] prayer, pursued far enough, becomes praise. Any prayer, no matter how desperate its origin, no matter how angry and fearful the experiences it traverses, ends up in praise. It does not always get there quickly or easily—the trip can take a lifetime—but the end is always praise. ...There are intimations of this throughout the Psalms. Not infrequently, even in the middle of a terrible lament, defying logic and without transition, praise erupts. Psalm 13 for instance.

... Psalm 150 does not stand alone; four more hallelujah psalms are inserted in front of it so that it becomes the fifth of five psalms that conclude the Psalter... These five hallelujah psalms are extraordinarily robust. [This means] ...no matter how much we suffer, no matter our doubts, no matter how angry we get, no matter how many times we have asked in desperation or doubt, "How long?", prayer develops finally into praise. Everything finds its way to the doorstep of praise... This is not to say that other prayers are inferior to praise, only that all prayer pursued far enough, becomes praise. ...Don't rush it. It may take years, decades even, before certain prayers arrive at the hallelujahs, at Psalm 146-150... Not every prayer is capped off with praise. In fact most prayers, if the Psalter is a true guide, are not. [But] prayer is always reaching towards praise and will finally arrive there.

So... our lives fill out in goodness; earth and heaven meet in an extraordinary conjunction. Clashing cymbals announce the glory: Blessing. Amen. Hallelujah. ⁴

Another benefit of praise

In praise, God invites us to enjoy him. C. S. Lewis wrote, “The Scotch catechism says that man’s chief end is ‘to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.’ But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.” ⁵

Summary

Where? Praise *in* everything.
Why? Praise *for* everything.
How? Praise *with* everything.
Who? Praise *by* everything.

All true prayer, pursued far enough, becomes praise. In praise, God invites to enjoy him!

Discuss

- 1. Describe a time where praising God for who he is changed how you dealt with circumstances—or describe a situation where doing so would change your attitude.**
- 2. Why does praising God bring you closer to him than asking for help or for blessings?**

ADORATION

Psalm 27

- ¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?
- ² When evil men advance against me
to devour my flesh,
when my enemies and my foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.
- ³ Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then will I be confident.
- ⁴ One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.
- ⁵ For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle
and set me high upon a rock.
- ⁶ Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the LORD.
- ⁷ Hear my voice when I call, O LORD,
be merciful to me and answer me.
- ⁸ My heart says of you, “Seek his face!”
Your face, LORD, I will seek.
- ⁹ Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.
Do not reject me or forsake me,
O God my Savior.
- ¹⁰ Though my mother and father forsake me,
The LORD will receive me.
- ¹¹ Teach me your way, O LORD;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.
- ¹² Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
breathing out violence.

¹³ I am still confident of this:

I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.

The problem of fear (vv. 1-3, 10-11)

Verse 1 announces that the psalm will address the problem of fear. Look at the whole psalm: What “fears” or threats does David face?

First, there is external attack and threat. (Verses 2-3: “evil men;” “my enemies;” “an army;” “war against me.”) Here we see the political and military enemies that are never far from David’s mind. It reminds us of the brutality of ancient cultures and how governing power was taken and maintained. However, David may be giving a hypothetical case when he says, “though an army besiege me.” That may be happening, but it seems more likely that he is not literally facing it. Rather, he is saying, “I have something that will secure me even if this happens.”

Secondly, there is internal disappointment and loss. (Verses 10-11: “though my father and mother forsake me.”) This again is probably only a hypothetical case; he probably is not literally facing this. Rather, he is running the gamut from the most outward attack on his body to the greatest internal pain in the heart—rejection by parents. He is saying, “I have something that will secure me even if this happens.”

Ernest Becker writes, “I think taking life seriously means that whatever you do must be done in the lived truth of the evil and terror of life, of the rumble of panic underneath everything—otherwise it is phony.” ⁶ The Bible gives us a strategy for living that does not minimize the “evil and terror” or the “rumble of panic underneath everything.” It fully assumes that wars devastate, that enemies are real, and that even fathers and mothers may not be there for us. David has an approach to life that can handle external attacks and internal disappointments and loss.

The antidote to fear (v. 4)

What is David getting at in the first half of verse 4, when he seeks to “dwell in the house of the LORD *all* the days of my life”? What does this mean? Priests and Levites literally lived in the temple, near the altar and the Holy Place. It is not likely that David is pondering his resignation as king to become a priest! Rather, he is yearning for the same kind of unbroken contact with the presence of God typified by literally living in the temple courts. A similar sentiment is expressed in Psalm 84:3: “Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself... a place near your altar.” The psalmist pictures himself as a bird that has flit about busily from place to place, but now has at

last come home to God. What is being desired is a sustained and profound sense of God's reality and presence. The writers of Psalms 27 and 84 are both saying: "I've had intermittent fellowship with God, but now I've set my heart toward the Lord in a new way. I want to constantly enjoy his presence."

Notice the repetition at the beginning of verse 4. It is often translated: "One thing only I ask of the LORD; One thing only I will seek." This is the language of deep and firm resolve. He is determined to find real and continual fellowship with God in prayer.

In the second half of verse 4, David seeks to do two things in the house of the LORD: "To gaze upon the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple."

[Note: We're using here an older translation of verse 4b, which is better than the NIV translation.]

First, to "gaze upon the beauty of the LORD" is a striking phrase and perhaps the center of the psalm. What does it mean?

1. To "gaze"—or to behold—means something much more than awareness. Gazing is like staring. We can't help ourselves. We can't get enough of the sight. We are trying to look and look because we want it imprinted on our mind for future recall. Since David is probably not talking of a literal vision, we assume that he is referring to the difference between intellectually knowing that God is great and actually finding a sense of God's greatness and glory in the heart. Here's the classic account of the difference:

There is a difference between having an *opinion*, that God is holy and gracious, and having a *sense* of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former that knows not how honey tastes; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind. ⁷

When we move from intellectual knowledge to a spiritual sensing of God, we are finding him beautiful. So to gaze is essentially the same as meditation. We ponder, reflect, and meditate on God's Person, attributes, and deeds until we find them becoming spiritually real to our hearts.

To gaze on God's "beauty" also speaks of another aspect of spiritual experience. While "gazing" refers to the way God becomes spiritually *real* to us, "beauty" refers to how God becomes spiritually *satisfying* to us. Something is beautiful to us if we enjoy it for what it is in itself. For example, music that is beautiful is experienced as satisfying in itself. We don't listen to it to get something or acquire something through it. It is an end in itself. Thus "to gaze on the beauty of the Lord" means to find God ravishing and satisfying just for who he is in himself. That is adoration. Unlike repentance (which asks for God's

forgiveness) or petition (which asks for God's action) or even thanksgiving (which focuses on something God already has done for us), adoration is asking for nothing but God himself.

2. To "inquire in his temple" means not so much a preoccupation with God's person as with his will. The word "inquire" means to seek an oracle. In the temple, the Urim and the Thummim were two stones on the priest's breastplate which could give yes or no answers from God. A person could inquire for a word from God through the Urim and Thummim or simply seek a prophecy. Today, of course, we have a source of God's will that is far better than a one-time prophecy or revelation. We have the Bible, the Word of God. This is where we can fruitfully inquire.

If we understand the meaning of the word "inquire" rightly, however, we get here a wonderfully balanced picture of how to go deeper into God. We are not to do so simply with our intellect *or* simply through mystical experience. Derek Kidner says, *"To behold and to inquire: a preoccupation with God's Person and His will. It is the essence... of discipleship."*⁸

The results of whole-hearted contemplation (vv. 5-6)

In verse 6 David says, "Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD." When David says "then," he is setting up a cause and effect relationship between the dwelling and gazing of verse 4 with the security, fearlessness, and confidence of verses 5-6. What is the nature of that confidence?

Does he mean in verse 6 that his enemies will literally be unable to touch him and attack him because he will be worshipping in the tabernacle? That is not likely. If enemies wanted to attack him, they could either walk in to the tabernacle or just wait for him to come out. This must mean that the contemplation of God itself dissolves his fears. His mind, in a sense, is taken off of himself. This is very mysterious when it happens.

Christian experience follows suit here. When sensations of God's beauty fill you with joy, the confidence that flows out does not consist of some certainty that somehow God will not let anything bad occur. Rather, you become so full of joy in God, and so aware that neither death nor life, neither defeat nor victory, will break your relationship with him (Ps. 23:6 and Rom. 8:38-39)—that the circumstances of this life cease to bother you. The wisdom of God is so real that you rest in his purposes. His glory is so real that your own reputation and prospects don't seem quite as important. This does not make you passive. Rather, it "lifts your head" above your enemies (v. 6).

David is essentially saying, "God's gracious love is not only better than anything *in* life, but it is even better than *life*. If I have this, I'm not even all that worried about dying." Again we are back to the idea of God's beauty. The psalmist does not see the value of God's love in that "it strengthens me so I can reach my goals." Rather, God's love is an end in itself. A primary mark of real Christian experience is that you come to love God for the shining, satisfying magnificence of who he is in himself, and not how he benefits you.

To religious people, God is useful. To Christians, God is beautiful.

Preparing for the presence of God (vv. 7-14)

The exuberant prospect of verses 4-6 is not currently a reality. David does not have this triumphant experience of God. How, then, does he pray and prepare his life for the presence of God?

Just as Elijah built an altar, laid out a sacrifice, and prayed for God's fire to come down (1 Kings 18:16-40), so we have to prepare our own lives and hearts for a visitation by God, a deeper experience of him. This image of preparing an altar is helpful because it shows us that we are not to be passive. At the same time, it also shows us that we are not in control. There is no formula that automatically connects us to God. We ultimately rely on God to come to us.

First, we see that David is repentant and asking for mercy despite his sins. Both verse 7 ("be merciful to me") and verse 9 ("do not hide your face... in anger") show that he recognizes that he does not deserve the presence of God. He is confessing his sin and repenting.

Second, we see David express his willingness to rearrange his life to be more obedient (v. 11). "David is not only a worshipper seeking God's *face* (v.8) but a pilgrim committed to His *way* (v.11). ...He is very much in the world, and a prayer for a *level path* is not for comfort but for sure progress (as a moral term it implies what is right, or straight) when the merest slip would be exploited." ⁹

Third, David reminds himself of God's promises and his nature, to build his own confidence that God will "let him in" to his presence. He reminds himself that God has been "my helper" in the past (v. 9b), that God is more to be trusted than even parents (v. 10), and that God wants to show us goodness in this life (v. 13).

Lastly, David "seeks his face" (v. 8). This is almost certainly the same thing as "gazing on the beauty of the LORD" (v. 4)—meditating on and adoring God. However, he mentions that "my heart says of you, 'Seek his face!'" (v. 8a). That seems to mean that he believes that God himself has put it in his heart to seek him. (Some translations say, "You have said to my heart, 'Seek my face.'") The psalmist encourages himself that his longing, and even his sense of God's absence, *is a sign that God is with him*. He only longs for God because God put it in his heart to do so. As Derek Kidner notes, "He will not ask for our love (v.8a) and then withhold his own (v.9a)." ¹⁰

In verses 4-6, David foresees three stages to going deeper into God. First, *dwelling*. That means he is going to make sustained prayer and fellowship with God a new priority. This is his new resolve and discipline. No longer will he simply seek God in fits and starts, or only when there is a crisis. He is going to dwell with God. Second, *gazing* and *inquiring*. He is going to meditate on the truth and contemplate the Lord till he breaks through and senses his beauty. Third, *sacrificing with shouts of joy*. He knows that eventually, there will be such a deep joy in worship that his head will be lifted up and he will fear no enemy.

Discuss

1. How would you change the orientation of your prayers in order to more fully experience God?
2. How would you adjust your life in order to be in a closer relationship with God?

1. As a group, make a list of God's attributes that you hold dear.

- ¹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 491.
- ² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 491.
- ³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 492.
- ⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 122-123, 127-128.
- ⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Harcourt Books, 1958), 96-97.
- ⁶ Ernest Becker, *Escape From Evil* (New York: The Free Press, Simon & Schuster, 1975).
- ⁷ Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," *The Complete Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2 (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 14.
- ⁸ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 121.
- ⁹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 121.
- ¹⁰ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 121.

Prayer

Confession and Repentance

Study 10

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 32 is a psalm of confession and repentance. In it, David looks back on a time of repentance and provides a theologically balanced illustration of what a prayer of confession looks like. It is important to see that God accepts our repentance even when it is imperfect. We will consider the different aspects of repentance by going through the psalm's different sections.

Psalm 32

- ¹ Blessed is he
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
- ² Blessed is the man
whose sin the LORD does not count against him
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- ³ When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- ⁴ For day and night
your hand was heavy upon me,
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
- ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"
—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.
- ⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you
while you may be found;
surely when the mighty waters rise,
they will not reach him.
- ⁷ You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.
- ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you and watch over you.

- ⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule,
which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle
or they will not come to you.
- ¹⁰ Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the LORD 's unfailing love
surrounds the man who trusts in him.
- ¹¹ Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

THE BLESSING OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS (vv. 1-2)

Verses 1-2 describe the blessing of being pardoned or forgiven by God. There are four things that are part of the "blessedness" and joy of people whose sin has been dealt with by God.

First, God *forgives* our transgression (v.1a). In general, to forgive something means to lift it up and throw it away—to remove it. But second, God *covers* our transgression (v.1b). This metaphor is different from the idea of forgiveness. When we cover something, it is still present, but we are not letting it affect us in the same way. We remove it from our consideration.

It is very important that these two ideas are kept together. If we only thought of our sin as forgiven, we might think that as soon as God pardons us, our sin will be gone, never to trouble us again. If, on the other hand, we only thought of our sin as covered, we might think that once God pardons us, we can live any way we wish. But together, we can see that in a Christian, sin cannot condemn us and it has lost much of its power over us, but it is still present. We must not imagine that we have gotten completely free of it.

Third, God *does not count our sin against us*. This is the most clear and specific of all the metaphors. It uses accounting and legal language. We are told that God does not "*count*" (or "*reckon*" or "*impute*", in the older translations) us as sinners. Though we have sinned, God does not treat us as if we are sinners. Paul quotes verse 2 in Romans 4:6-8, where he says that David "speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works." That is an extremely interesting reading of verse 2! David says only that God does not count a repentant believer as a sinner. "But," Paul is saying, "this means that he must be counting us as *righteous*, apart from our actual record." Paul then reads verse 2 as saying: "Great blessedness comes to the one whose sinful record is not counted, but rather is treated by God as if his record is one of perfect righteousness."

Surely Old Testament readers would have found this claim marvelous and wonderful—but extremely mysterious. *How* can God take our sin off us and not

give us any consequences for it? And even more—how can he treat us as righteous, as sinless? We know what Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:21, namely that it was *Christ* who was counted as sinner for our sakes so that we could be counted as righteous for his sake. He is treated as our record deserves, and we are treated as his record deserves.

Fourth, we are told that the person whose sin is forgiven and covered by imputed righteousness has a spirit in whom “*is no deceit*” (v.2b). This does not mean that a forgiven person is perfect, but rather that he or she is honest, not hiding or covering his or her flaws from God, self, or others. The question may arise—is this transparency the *result* of the pardon or the *means* of it? The answer is *both*. It takes transparency to be pardoned (see v.5). At the same time, the sense of being accepted (v.2a) makes it possible to admit flaws and sins freely.

Discuss

- 1. What do verses 1 and 2 contribute to our understanding of what God does about our sin? Compare to Romans 4:7-8. Why do we need to be mindful of each of the four aspects of God's forgiveness?**
- 2. How should you view sin and repentance, knowing that Jesus has borne all the consequences of your sins so that you can be seen as righteous by God?**
- 3. What would lead you to try to hide your sins? How should you deal with your attempts to hide your sins?**

A GUIDE TO REPENTANCE (vv. 3-10)

What practical things can we learn from David in these verses about how to truly repent?

First, there must be a very simple *honesty* (v.5). As someone put it, “If we cover our own sin—v. 5—then God will expose it; but if we uncover our sin, then God will cover it—v. 2.” But honesty alone is not repentance.

Second, David fills his heart with a sense of the *danger* of sin. He enumerates the problems and bad consequences of sin. One danger (v.3) is that his sin and guilt are bad for his health. His strength, probably spiritual as well as physical, is sapped (v.4).

Third, however, David fills his heart with a sense of the *guilt* of sin. If we don’t think of the danger of sin, we may not initially get the motivation to repent. But if the only motivation for repentance is the avoidance of the consequences, we are not really going deep enough. We are to repent for our *sin*, not simply for the *consequences* of sin. Are we sorry for what we did, or sorry that we got caught? If we are only sorrowful for our own pain and inconvenience, then we will find that we have gained no self-control at all. As soon as it becomes possible to do the sinful act without consequences, we will find ourselves back in it. But David says, “Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you” (v.9). This is a powerful metaphor. Mules neither love you nor understand your mind and heart enough to come to you just because you want them to come. They must be controlled through rewards and punishments. They will only come if you can make it worth their while. They will only come for *their* sake, not for yours.

We are then to be willing to leave our sin simply because we love God; we want to do it for his sake. That means we should turn from sin not primarily because it is dangerous to us, but because it grieves and offends our Lord. We should sense the *guilt* of our sin before God, not just the danger of its consequences.

Fourth, David prays in *hope of unmerited mercy*. In verse 10 David says that “the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.” This is a reference not to God’s love in general, but to his *chesedh*, his promised, covenanted, unconditional love. To truly repent, you certainly need emotional humility—a sense of the danger and guilt of your sin. Without it, you won’t experience the life-changing freedom of repentance. But, on the other hand, to truly repent, you need also emotional “wealth.” You need a deep hope and assurance of God’s commitment to you, his love and mercy toward you.

You can’t know yourself only as a worthless sinner. That will not produce repentance, only self-pity and self-flagellation. There will be no “answering touch” (Ps. 6:8-9) of the Lord’s mercy. There will be no release and relief. Not

only that, but it is not really possible to be honest about how sinful you are *unless* you have the confidence that God loves you. If you base your self-image on your record and performance, it will be too traumatic to admit the extent of your sinfulness. You will be in denial, rationalizing and screening out evidence of deep character flaws. Unless you believe that “the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds” you, you will not be able to repent. It takes the good news of the gospel as much as the bad news to lead our hearts to admit what we really are.

When we Christian believers get to this fourth element in repentance, we have a far greater resource for hope than David did. He knew of the remarkable promises of God to bless us no matter what (see Genesis 15). But we have Jesus Christ on the cross. “The fact of Jesus coming is the final and unanswerable proof that God cares,” said William Barclay. This is the ultimate assurance of unfailing love. It is in light of this infallible assurance that we have the emotional wealth to admit our sin. When we know Christ, we truly have a “hiding place” (v.7). As Moses was sheltered in the cleft of the rock so he could be in the presence of God, so we are now “hidden in Christ” (Col. 3:1-3), because the rock of Moses is a type of Christ (1 Cor. 10:4).

Fifth, David hears God saying *he must now live an obedient, changed life*. In verse 8 David hears God saying, “I will now tell you exactly what I want you to do.” In verse 11, he calls us to be “upright.” In other words, the last element in repentance is a very concrete resolution to change behavior. Repentance is not simply expressing sorrow for sin; it is changing the life—obeying. Notice that the call to obey (v.8) is connected to a call to do so out of love for God (v.9). If we have filled our hearts with how our sin has grieved God and with the cost of our sin to God (on the cross), we will find that our hearts *want* to obey God. Sin will lose its attractive power over us. We will not be obeying simply out of duty or out of a series of rewards and punishments.

Choose one sin that most people in your group have struggled with. Some examples are greed, envy, or lying. Now answer the following five questions using that sin as the basis of your discussion.

- 1. What would an honest confession of this sin to God look like?**
- 2. What dangers do you sense when you are in the grip of this sin?**
- 3. What would it take to get you to feel the weight of this sin?**

4. What would it take for you to freely admit this sin?

5. What would you do to make an effective change in your life to avoid this sin after confessing it? What would you rely on for help?

Group Activity

Take what you concluded in your discussion and compose a prayer of repentance using the five elements David employed. Pray this prayer together, with thanksgiving for the assurance of complete forgiveness and unconditional love for those in Christ Jesus.

Prayer

APPENDIX A

SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP PRAYER

Conversational prayer can be used any time two or more people pray together. It differs from what we often experience in group prayer—talking in detail about our prayer needs so there is little time to pray, or one long monologue prayer after another. *Conversational prayer* recognizes that prayer is really dialogue, and includes God from the outset. We converse in prayer not only with him but with the others present. It is prayer in which we invite the Holy Spirit to lead us and expect his edifying work among us.

You will find suggestions for the focus of your group prayer times throughout this study. You have the freedom, of course, to shift the focus as the Spirit is leading. When you pray as a group outside the study, it is wise for the leader to present a focus or purpose of the prayer gathering, and to start the prayer time with praise to the One to whom we pray.

Getting started

- Don't take time to share prayer requests unless you do so very briefly. Let them come out as you pray.
- Agree to confidentiality if this is appropriate.

Basic guidelines for praying

- Be brief. Limit yourself to a couple of sentences at a time, covering one thought instead of many.
- Use everyday language.
- Pray spontaneously instead of going around the circle.
- Build on the prayers of others, as in conversation. When a topic is complete, it will be clear by the silence. Anyone can move on to the next topic, not just the leader.
- If a Scripture passage comes to mind, do pray it if it seems at all related. This is often how the Holy Spirit edifies our prayers.
- Pray loud enough so others can hear you. For those with soft voices, don't pray with your head down.
- Pray silently along with the one who is praying. Discipline yourself not to think about what you'll pray next. Stay actively involved when you are not praying.

- Don't rush to fill a silence. Silences are normal and can actually be restful.
- If someone is uncomfortable praying aloud (very common), give him or her the freedom to pass and to pray along silently.
- Don't close each prayer with "in Jesus' Name, Amen." Assume that every prayer is prayed in His Name. This fosters a continuity or flow in prayer until the very end, when the leader of the group will close "in Jesus' Name" for the entire prayer session.

Adapted from the Navigator's Conversational Prayer guidelines for Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2006.

Prayer

APPENDIX B

PRAYER WALKING IN THE CITY

“Lift up your eyes. Are not the fields white for harvest?” “Pray to the Lord of the harvest.”

Prayer walking enables you to pray on site with insight, praying nearer and clearer.

Prayer Walking: Why?

1. Praying together (2x2) is powerful.
2. Spiritual mission and warfare become immediate, in the here and now.
 - You see the mission field head-on.
 - You see the “whole man” in his community, social and economic context, and problems.
3. Prayer walking stirs your heart to see people, places, and needs through God’s eyes. It encourages “harvest eyes” rather than cloistered fear.
4. Prayer strengthens Christians and brings evangelists to a neighborhood as we pray for the Lord to send “laborers into his harvest.”
5. Prayer walking opens doors and hearts to the gospel.
6. Prayer walking *changes*
 - Neighborhoods into parishes
 - Believers into missionary pastors
 - Homes into ministry centers
 - Churches into the central place of kingdom renewal.

Prayer Walking: How?

1. Specifics:
 - Go in groups of 2 to 4—pairing up is best (or on your own).
 - Pray as you walk, out loud, eyes open. Stop at corners and landmarks.
 - Pray shorter prayers. Pass it back and forth.
 - Play off each others’ prayer to focus on a specific need or opportunity, or to continue on a prayer theme.

2. Ask God to give you harvest eyes and a spirit of grace and supplication. Ask for boldness and open doors to this city and community. Confess fears, weaknesses, and indifference to those “outside.”
3. Ask God to give insight into his specific kingdom plans and purposes for this city and community. Ask to fit into his plan. Rejoice in the opportunity.
4. Pray for the Christians and churches in the community where you are walking. Pray that our homes and church would be “ministry centers” in our community.
5. Pray for the critical needs in the neighborhood you are walking—social, economic, spiritual and so on.
6. Pray for specific streets, houses, and people you meet. Hit the critical intersections and nerve centers with specific prayer.

Used and adapted with permission from John Smed, Grace Vancouver Church, Vancouver, B. C. (2006).

