

A serene landscape photograph featuring a calm lake in the foreground, a person standing on a rocky shore in the middle ground, and a large, rugged mountain peak in the background. The scene is framed by evergreen trees on the right. The word "PRAYER" is overlaid in white text on the left side of the image.

PRAYER

ARE YOU READY FOR AN ADVENTURE? ARE YOU READY TO EXPERIENCE JESUS IN WHOLE A NEW WAY? IN THIS STUDY YOU WILL LEARN THINGS THAT CAN TOTALLY ALTER YOUR MIND AND YOUR HEART. ULTIMATELY, WHAT YOU WILL LEARN CAN CHANGE EVERY RELATIONSHIP YOU HAVE AND ALTER THE COURSE OF YOUR LIFE. IN THIS EXCITING SESSION WE WILL BE LEARNING ABOUT PRAYER.

AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE

INTIMATE CONVERSATION

Are you ready for an adventure? Are you ready to experience Jesus in whole a new way? In this study you will learn things that can totally alter your mind and your heart. Ultimately, what you will learn can change every relationship you have and alter the course of your life. In this exciting session we will be learning about prayer.

Be honest for a moment. Did you cringe a little when you realized we were going to be talking about prayer? Just relax.

You have probably heard a lot about prayer before, but you will be learning about prayer in a way you may not have experienced before. We will learn about different ways to pray, and we will also confront every stronghold in our lives that makes us want to fall asleep while we

pray. Prayer is one of the most radical heart changers in the “tool belt” of Christian growth. In fact, the enemy will try every trick possible in order to keep you from hitting your knees.

Why is prayer so life altering? It can be explained this way. Have you ever had a new friend in your life who left a huge impression on you? Maybe you listened to a new kind of music because of him, or maybe you followed a dream because of her.

In a similar way, prayer puts us in touch with the best friend we will ever have. Jesus desires to not only be our Lord, but also our friend. The King of the Universe wants to spend time with us and show himself to us. And prayer is the basic building block of this friendship. It is intimate conversation with Christ. When you spend quality time with Jesus, you naturally start picking up some good habits from him. You begin to see circumstances and people the same way he does.

Prayer does not just bring a general change to our lives. Rather, it moves us toward the original design God has for us. God made us on purpose and for a purpose. The best way to discover that purpose, and to live it, is to have a relationship with the Lord—the one who created

that purpose. Daily conversation with the Lord moves us into God's original design for our lives.

A friendship with Jesus is definitely good for us. But what is surprising is that it is good for him too. Scripture says we can please God by faith (Hebrews 11:6). This means we can touch the heart of God through our intimacy with him. What better way to learn how to bless a friend than to talk to him or her?

Ask yourself these questions and check all that apply to you:

- *Do I have a difficult time staying awake when I pray?*
- *Does my mind wander when I try to pray?*
- *Do I look forward to praying, or is it something that I know I should do but have a hard time doing?*
- *When I pray, do I sometimes feel like he is disappointed with me? In other words, do I think that I have not prayed enough, so I start my prayer times already defeated?*

If you checked any of those boxes, then know that you are in good company. The disciples also had similar problems and asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

Break up into your small groups:

- *Tell the Lord that you want to learn how to pray.*
- *Ask the Lord to show up in the class and help everyone grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus.*

UNDERSTANDING DAVID: WORSHIP AND WARFARE

Before we delve into the different types of prayer, it is important to first engage the heart of prayer. When you think of prayer, what are the images that immediately come to mind? Do you think of being at church and praying for someone's second cousin's gall bladder? Do you think of bowing your head before you eat? Kneeling beside your bed before going to sleep? Is it an image of quiet and stillness? Yes, these are all types of prayer, but the time has come to shatter the powerlessness of how you actually see prayer.

There is only one man in Scripture whom God describes as "a man after my own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). The man is David, and he is our example of what conversation with the King should look like. There are four attributes of David that shape our understanding of the heart of prayer.

1. THE MAN WHO CARRIED THE HARP AND SANG THE SONGS IS THE SAME MAN WHO DREW HIS SWORD IN BATTLE.

David's ability to write psalms and worship God almost seems in contradiction to the rock-slinging, sword-wielding warrior who also emerges in battle. However, the faith and fierceness necessary to battle the enemies of God are the direct result of worship. As David's heart dwelled on the character of God Almighty, it became rooted in his heart. As a result, David's own heart was transformed. Worship became the perfect preparation for battle.

David was convinced of God's sovereignty and of God's indignation over sin. The more David knew God, the more he recognized that warfare was in the very nature of God.

THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH AND MY SONG; HE HAS BECOME MY SALVATION. HE IS MY GOD, AND I WILL PRAISE HIM, MY FATHER'S GOD, AND I WILL EXALT HIM. THE LORD IS A WARRIOR; THE LORD IS HIS NAME. *_EXODUS 15:2-3 (NIV)*

Not only did David know that warfare was in God's character, but he also understood that victory in battle gave glory to God—especially when the odds were against him. Therefore, wielding his sword became a natural extension of strumming his harp. They were forms of worship, and they both gave glory to God.

DAVID SAID TO THE PHILISTINE, "YOU COME AGAINST ME WITH SWORD AND SPEAR AND JAVELIN, BUT I COME AGAINST YOU IN THE NAME OF THE LORD ALMIGHTY, THE GOD OF THE ARMIES OF ISRAEL, WHOM YOU HAVE DEFIED. THIS DAY THE LORD WILL HAND YOU OVER TO ME, AND I'LL STRIKE YOU DOWN AND CUT

OFF YOUR HEAD. TODAY I WILL GIVE THE CARCASSES OF THE PHILISTINE ARMY TO THE BIRDS OF THE AIR AND THE BEASTS OF THE EARTH, AND THE WHOLE WORLD WILL KNOW THAT THERE IS A GOD IN ISRAEL. ALL THOSE GATHERED HERE WILL KNOW THAT IT IS NOT BY SWORD OR SPEAR THAT THE LORD SAVES; FOR THE BATTLE IS THE LORD'S, AND HE WILL GIVE ALL OF YOU INTO OUR HANDS."

_1 SAMUEL 17:45-47 (NIV)

Like the images of David strumming his harp, our understanding of worship is often limited to the warm and peaceful emotions of singing in church. However, David's leadership in some fierce and bloody battles made the name of the Lord known throughout the whole world. Warfare is worship. It is the natural result of beholding the character of God.

Ask yourself these questions: What is the Goliath in my life? Are there circumstances that mock the power of God in my life? Do I have the faith to fight the battle? Am I ready for the fierce and bloody war?

As a boy, David knew the character of God well enough to know that if Goliath mocked the Lord Almighty, then the Lord himself would win the battle. Since we were created to worship God, it is in our nature to wield the sword as well. It says in Exodus that the "Lord is a warrior." In addition to warfare as worship, warfare is in God's nature. Since we were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), being a warrior is a part of our identity too. It is part of who God created us to be. Any way in which we have labeled ourselves differently than a "fierce warrior" is a lie—shyness and hesitancy are lies. We are warriors.

Do you see how a religious understanding of worship and prayer robs us of our true identity in God? We are warriors by nature. Fear of what others might think about us completely shuts down the warrior within us. Would David have challenged Goliath if he was worried what his brothers might think of him? Inhibition is a thief, robbing us of our true identity in Christ.

2. WORSHIP WAS A CONSTANT PART OF DAVID'S LIFE.

Just as worship was an integral part of David's life, it should be a driving force in our everyday lives too. Worship should not be limited to singing at church or listening to praise music while in our cars. What might begin as forty-five seconds of thanking God for what he has done in our lives needs to explode and become all-consuming. Our days should be filled with an attitude of thanksgiving. Our entire day can be marked by thanking God for all that he does for us.

EXALT THE LORD OUR GOD AND WORSHIP AT HIS FOOTSTOOL—HE IS HOLY.

_PSALM 99:5 (NIV)

There is urgency and desperation in this command. Our knowledge and conviction that God is holy should drive us to continuously praise and give him thanks.

3. DAVID REMEMBERED WHAT GOD HAD DONE FOR HIM.

I WILL PRAISE YOU, O LORD, WITH ALL MY HEART; I WILL TELL OF ALL YOUR WONDERS. *_PSALM 9:1 (NIV)*

Like Moses's song in Exodus 15, David's psalms are filled with a recollection of God's work in his life. Remembering what God has done in our lives is a crucial form of worship. It builds faith by reminding us that God has already moved on our behalf; it helps us to believe that he will do it again. Declaring God's wonderful works keeps our hearts in a state of gratitude and determined faith. As we converse with our King, much of our conversation will start with "Remember when you did _____?" and end with, "Thanks! That was awesome. You are beyond amazing." Gratitude naturally leads us into simple adoration of our Savior.

4. NOTHING RESTRAINED DAVID'S EXPRESSIONS OF THANKSGIVING AND ADORATION TO THE LORD.

In 1 Chronicles 15, David moved the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. All of Israel brought the ark into Jerusalem with music, cymbals, and singing. David led the procession by dancing and leaping with joy. There was no inhibition in David's worship of the Lord. He threw all of his passion into celebrating what the Lord had done for them—so much so that his wife despised him for it.

What marks your life of worship? Do you sing with all your heart only when you are in the car? If you felt the Spirit moving you, would you leap for joy? Would you dance? What marks your life of prayer? Is it kind of boring? Does it feel mechanical? Could you describe it as passionate?

Before the different types of prayer are described, we must attack everything that might limit our conversations with the Lord. We want to clear the way for passion to arise in us when it comes to prayer.

As we move forward and begin to learn about the different kinds of prayer, keep the image of David—the worshiping warrior—in mind. Prayer is truly an intimate conversation with our loving King. It should be filled with emotion and passion. Often it will include fierce battles and action steps; at other times it will sound like a tender love song. Our prayer lives, including our worship, will reflect intimacy with Jesus. We can give our hearts to our King. He is so trustworthy. This journey will be more satisfying than anything else in our lives.

LEADER NOTE:

As a group, take time to confess inhibition and religion. (Do the work thoroughly. Work through the four Rs for both passivity and religion. Ask the Lord for some action steps for the group in order to clearly walk out of inhibition and religion in this area.)

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF PRAYER?

When learning how to pray, there is a helpful tool to remember how to keep our conversation with Jesus both intimate and healthy. The acronym is **TACIS** (pronounced “TACK-iss”), and it can help us remember the five types of prayer.

T is _____.¹

Thanking God for what he has done in our lives.

A is _____.²

Praising God for who he is.

C is _____.³

Acknowledging our sin while praying.

I is _____.⁴

Praying for others.

S is _____.⁵

Praying for ourselves.

1. PRAISE

Adoration and thanksgiving are the peditrics of prayer. This means that the life of worship and thanksgiving is the foundation of our prayer life, the very foundation of our relationship with Christ. When our mind is focused on all that we are thankful for, then our day will be radically different. Praise and thanksgiving open our hearts to the Lord through prayer. They are like keys to open the door to the courts of the Almighty, allowing us to enter into his presence with joyful hearts.

ENTER HIS GATES WITH THANKSGIVING AND HIS COURTS WITH PRAISE; GIVE THANKS TO HIM AND PRAISE HIS NAME. FOR THE LORD IS GOOD AND HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER; HIS FAITHFULNESS CONTINUES THROUGH ALL GENERATIONS. *_PSALM 11:4-5 (NIV)*

A. PRAYER IS ABOUT _____.⁶

Let us not be confused by thinking that God is forcing us to say nice things about him before he will listen to us. God desires to be praised; however, praise aids us as well. Adoration and thanksgiving actually prepare our hearts to receive from him.

Think about any relationship you have for a moment. What happens when you start a conversation with a friend by thanking him for something he has done for you? How about when you praise your friend for specific things that she has done? How does this change your heart toward that individual? Your heart is more open and softened, and your relationship grows deeper.

B. BEGIN WITH _____.¹

Start prayer times by thanking the Lord for what he has done for you. Also thank him for what he will continue to do on your behalf. Thanksgiving will always awaken your love toward God and fill your heart with joy. An attitude of gratitude washes away negative thoughts, hardness, and distance, thus opening the door for great intimacy with Jesus.

HOW CAN I REPAY THE LORD FOR ALL HIS GOODNESS TO ME? ...I WILL SACRIFICE A THANK OFFERING TO YOU AND CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD.

_PSALM 116:12, 17 (NIV)

C. PRAISE INCLUDES THANKSGIVING AND _____.⁷

If thanksgiving is praising God for what he has done, then adoration is praising God for who he is.

O LORD, OPEN MY LIPS, AND MY MOUTH WILL DECLARE YOUR PRAISE.

_PSALM 51:15 (NIV)

Think about his attributes, or list the qualities you have discovered about God (for example, his love, forgiveness, or his mercy). As you begin to praise the Lord for these attributes, you will become strengthened and your heart will become awakened and alive. You will suddenly realize that nothing is too difficult for God.

AH, SOVEREIGN LORD, YOU HAVE MADE THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH BY YOUR GREAT POWER AND OUTSTRETCHED ARM. NOTHING IS TOO HARD FOR YOU.

_JEREMIAH 32:1 (NIV)

D. THE TRAPS

The _____ of _____⁸ is always a trap. It always gets in the way of our relationship with Jesus. If we worry about what everyone around us thinks, we will never be able to truly enter the courts of praise. Remember, prayer is all about relationship. When a couple are in love, are they ashamed to let others know? No, of course they are not. In the same way, there is no reason to be ashamed of your relationship with Christ. It is a good thing to know the Creator of the Universe and to experience intimacy with him every day.

We will practice thanking the Lord and praising him out loud in class.

LEADER NOTE:

- Sing two songs as a class. Give everyone the words and arrange for a guitar player to come to class to lead worship.
- In small groups, have participants practice thanking God out loud for something he did this week.

It is important to stop the class for another special warning about a potential trap:

_____ ⁹ stops us from having true intimacy with God. Do you remember what religion is? Religion is a _____ ¹⁰ without _____ ¹¹ or _____ ¹².

We will spend time each week addressing what religion looks like. The first aspect of religion we will cover is having our eyes focused on people instead of on God. The religious person is concerned with how he or she appears to others. How do others see me? There is a tremendous amount of fear of people in religion because it causes us to be concerned with how other people view us. Even when we worship God, we can become concerned with those around us; we can become afraid to pray out loud or even raise our voice in prayer.

In addition to religion, passivity is a huge prayer blocker. The passive person never seems to get around to praying. This week our homework is to work through the passivity stronghold worksheet (as a review from the Freedom Class). Passivity is a strong form of rebellion.

SUMMARY

1. It is all about _____.⁶
2. Prayer is an intimate _____¹³ with Jesus.
3. TACIS stands for:
 - a. T is for _____.¹
 - b. A is for _____.²
 - c. C is for _____.³
 - d. I is for _____.⁴
 - e. S is for _____.⁵
4. Thanksgiving praises God for _____.¹⁴
5. Adoration praises God for _____.¹⁵
6. The traps are:
 - a. _____.⁹
 - b. _____.¹⁶
7. It is all about _____.⁶

KEY

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Thanksgiving | 9. Religion |
| 2. Adoration | 10. Form of godliness |
| 3. Confession | 11. the power |
| 4. Intercession | 12. intimacy |
| 5. Supplication | 13. conversation |
| 6. Relationship | 14. what he has done |
| 7. Adoration | 15. who he is |
| 8. Fear of man | 16. Passivity |

HOMEWORK

ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING:

1. Go through the passivity worksheet, which is included at the end of this lesson.
2. Read the following summary from Elizabeth Alves's book *Becoming a Prayer Warrior* (pg. 47, Renew Books, 1998). In her book, Alves summarizes the seven expressions of praise found in the Hebrew language. Look up the verses for each of these seven ways to praise God and begin to practice them in your life:

a. Sacrifice—to render, or give back, thanksgiving or praise (Psalm 42:4; 100:4).

b. Gesture—to throw hands into the air (Psalm 67:3; 107:8, 15, 21, 31).

c. Gratitude—to kneel in gratitude for God's provision (Psalm 31:21; 63:4; 95:6).

d. Celebrate (Psalm 56:4; 150:1–2).

e. Music—to praise the Lord skillfully on an instrument (Psalm 21:13; 33:2; 98:4).

f. Corporate—to praise with others (Psalm 22:3, 25; 33:1; 35:28).

g. Say it—to comment on qualities of the Lord. Praise God for his mighty acts and deeds (Psalm 63:3–4; 117:1; 147:12).

3. Practice praising and thanking God by reading the Scriptures out loud. Start by reading a Psalm out loud to God each day. You can begin with Psalm 145:1–7.
4. Search for worship music to play in your home and car. Ask a friend for a favorite if you do not know where to begin. Enjoy some worship alone, just you and him.

AS CHRISTIANS, OUR HEARTS CAN OFTEN GROW COLD AND DISTANT FROM THE LORD. **ONE OF THE PRIMARY GOALS OF JESUS-MINISTRY IS FOR EACH OF US TO HAVE THE HEART OF CHRIST.** AS WE TEAR DOWN STRONGHOLDS IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS, IT IS FOR THE PURPOSE OF KNOWING JESUS MORE AND DEVELOPING HIS HEART.

THE ART OF INTERCESSION

JESUS IS OUR MODEL FOR INTERCESSION

WHO IS HE THAT CONDEMNS? CHRIST JESUS, WHO DIED—MORE THAN THAT, WHO WAS RAISED TO LIFE—IS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD AND IS ALSO INTERCEDING FOR US. *_ROMANS 8:34 (NIV)*

It is clear in Scripture that Christ is constantly interceding for his children. That means Jesus is praying for you right now. He is our ultimate example for intercession and having a heart cry for salvation and change in others. You may be wondering what intercession is. Intercession is simply praying on behalf of another person. In order to really pray for someone with conviction, however, you must be able to identify with them.

Identification is one of the deep roots of intercession. Jesus' identification with us is so intense that we really have a hard time understanding its depth. Think about what Jesus went through while on the earth. He experienced everything we do and much more. Not only does

Jesus identify with us and our struggles, but he took our place as our sin and sickness bearer on the cross. Jesus understands us because he became us—but he was without sin.

Think about the many ways Jesus identified with us:

- Loneliness.
- Persecution.
- Betrayal.
- Injustice.
- Pain.
- Brokenhearted.
- Misunderstood.
- Homeless and poor.
- Knew what it meant to work hard.
- Had a job (carpenter).
- Was a child.
- A teenager.
- Hated.
- Sorrowful.
- Faced hard and costly decisions.
- Faced opposition.
- Understood rejection.
- Treated with disrespect; made fun of.
- Accused falsely.
- Lied to.
- Knew what it meant to love someone and have them accuse him of wrongdoing.
- Knew what righteous anger felt like.

- Understood the pain of losing loved ones.
- Knew the pain of being mocked and spit upon.
- Knew what it meant to be ignored and mistrusted.

INTERCESSION: TO STAND IN THE GAP

THEREFORE HE IS ABLE TO SAVE COMPLETELY THOSE WHO COME TO GOD THROUGH HIM, BECAUSE HE ALWAYS LIVES TO INTERCEDE FOR THEM.

_HEBREWS 7:25 (NIV)

HE SAW THAT THERE WAS NO MAN, AND WONDERED THAT THERE WAS NO INTERCESSOR; THEREFORE HIS OWN ARM BROUGHT SALVATION FOR HIM.

_ISAIAH 59:16 (NKJV)

We see in the above verse from Isaiah that God was looking for an intercessor to stand in the gap. If God was looking for someone to intercede, then we can see just how rare a true intercessor is, because there was no one to stand in the gap. Intercession is prayer in which we generously give our all to God on behalf of others. We give our “heart and soul”; we give our “guts.” According to this passage, God could find no intercessor, so he sent his own Son, Jesus Christ.

Isaiah tells us that Jesus identified with our sin. He bore the sin of the world; he stood in the gap so that we could be free. In fact, he was the only one who could.

THEREFORE I WILL DIVIDE HIM A PORTION WITH THE GREAT, AND HE SHALL DIVIDE THE SPOIL WITH THE STRONG, BECAUSE HE Poured OUT HIS SOUL UNTO DEATH, AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS, AND HE BORE THE SIN OF MANY, AND MADE INTERCESSION FOR THE TRANSGRESSOR.

_ISAIAH 53:12 (NKJV)

SEE, MY SERVANT WILL ACT WISELY; HE WILL BE RAISED AND LIFTED UP AND

HIGHLY EXALTED. JUST AS THERE WERE MANY WHO WERE APPALLED AT HIM—HIS APPEARANCE WAS SO DISFIGURED BEYOND THAT OF ANY MAN AND HIS FORM MARRED BEYOND HUMAN LIKENESS—SO WILL HE SPRINKLE MANY NATIONS, AND KINGS WILL SHUT THEIR MOUTHS BECAUSE OF HIM. FOR WHAT THEY WERE NOT TOLD, THEY WILL SEE, AND WHAT THEY HAVE NOT HEARD, THEY WILL UNDERSTAND. *_ISAIAH 52:13-15 (NIV)*

Read Isaiah 53. To what depth did Christ identify with us?

QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE INTERCESSOR

Qualities that make a person an effective intercessor are:

1. A SPIRIT OF SUBMISSION.

Yielding to the Lord’s will is our heart. This means we align ourselves with God, not only in areas of holiness, but in all areas of obedience. We are submitted to his order, his timing, and his plan. To submit is to yield control and to “come under” the authority of another.

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...” *_MATTHEW 6:9-10 (NIV)*

2. LIVE IN UNITY AND AGREEMENT.

The book of Acts uses an interesting phrase several times about believers in Christ being in “one accord.” This means to run together in unity. In order for the Spirit of God to be unleashed in our midst, we must be in agreement with God and with one another. There is power in agreement. God is repelled by division. In fact,

the enemy thrives on division: he loves envy, strife, and all forms of gossip.

We go nowhere without a spirit of agreement. Unity is the fuel of a healthy prayer life. Without that fuel, we are stuck in place. The heart of an intercessor is to agree with others for breakthrough.

I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH WILL BE BOUND IN HEAVEN, AND WHATEVER YOU LOOSE ON EARTH WILL BE LOOSED IN HEAVEN. AGAIN, I TELL YOU THAT IF TWO OF YOU ON EARTH AGREE ABOUT ANYTHING YOU ASK FOR, IT WILL BE DONE FOR YOU BY MY FATHER IN HEAVEN. FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE COME TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I WITH THEM.

_MATTHEW 18:18-19 (NIV)

3. MOVE IN THE SPIRIT OF FAITH.

We cannot come to God expecting him to respond if we do not believe that he will respond when we pray. It is simple but true. We foster a spirit of faith in our own lives by obeying God through the trials of life, trusting that he will come through on his promises. We want to create an atmosphere in our churches and homes that yells, "Faith." To be an intercessor, we must begin to believe for the impossible.

AND WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD, BECAUSE ANYONE WHO COMES TO HIM MUST BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS AND THAT HE REWARDS THOSE WHO EARNESTLY SEEK HIM.

_HEBREWS 11:6 (NIV)

BUT WHEN HE ASKS, HE MUST BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT, BECAUSE HE WHO DOUBTS IS LIKE A WAVE OF THE SEA, BLOWN AND TOSSED BY THE WIND. THAT MAN SHOULD NOT THINK HE WILL RECEIVE ANYTHING FROM THE LORD; HE IS A DOUBLE-MINDED MAN, UNSTABLE IN ALL HE DOES. *_JAMES 1:6-8 (NIV)*

4. MOVE IN A SPIRIT OF PERSISTENCE

Intercessors moved by the Spirit of God are driven to never give up. They might get knocked back, discouraged, and weary, but they never give up. There are three key components to moving in a spirit of persistence:

A. INTERCESSORS ARE DRIVEN BY TRUTH, NOT EMOTIONS.

When we intercede for someone or something, we cannot look at the natural realm to judge our prayer's effectiveness. We see with the eyes of faith because we know the Word of God, and we believe in the character of God and his promises. In the Christian life, we fly by our instruments, not by our sight. We must be grounded in the Word of God.

Example: In 1999, John F. Kennedy Jr. was fatally wounded in a mysterious plane accident. One compelling theory is the fact that John Jr. had never learned to fly his six-seater Piper Saratoga 32 by the instruments. It was a hazy night with barely any moonlight. He flew by sight, became disoriented, and misjudged his location.

B. "GIVE HIM NO REST."

If there is one thing that God loves, it is to be bothered by intercessors. We must break the lie that God has "better things to do" than listen to our prayers. God loves us with an undying love. And he loves us to come to him with our own needs and the needs of others, being moved by our faith and persistence. The concept of persistence is found throughout the Scriptures and in the parables of Jesus:

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 (NIV)

THEN JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES A PARABLE TO SHOW THEM THAT THEY SHOULD ALWAYS PRAY AND NOT GIVE UP. HE SAID: "IN A CERTAIN TOWN THERE WAS A

JUDGE WHO NEITHER FEARED GOD NOR CARED ABOUT MEN. AND THERE WAS A WIDOW IN THAT TOWN WHO KEPT COMING TO HIM WITH THE PLEA, 'GRANT ME JUSTICE AGAINST MY ADVERSARY.' FOR SOME TIME HE REFUSED. BUT FINALLY HE SAID TO HIMSELF, 'EVEN THOUGH I DON'T FEAR GOD OR CARE ABOUT MEN, YET BECAUSE THIS WIDOW KEEPS BOTHERING ME, I WILL SEE THAT SHE GETS JUSTICE, SO THAT SHE WON'T EVENTUALLY WEAR ME OUT WITH HER COMING!'" AND THE LORD SAID, "LISTEN TO WHAT THE UNJUST JUDGE SAYS. AND WILL NOT GOD BRING ABOUT JUSTICE FOR HIS CHOSEN ONES, WHO CRY OUT TO HIM DAY AND NIGHT? WILL HE KEEP PUTTING THEM OFF? I TELL YOU, HE WILL SEE THAT THEY GET JUSTICE, AND QUICKLY."

_LUKE 18:1-8 (NIV)

How long can we wear another person's shoes? In other words, how long can we pray for someone else, longing in our hearts for them? Intercession is about persistently considering the needs and struggles of others with the compassionate heart of Christ.

C. "LEAVE US ALONE!"

Remember that we are in a war. We are not fighting men and women, but rather spiritual beings in heavenly realms. How does persistence and authority play into this battle? Look at this verse in Mark, and notice how the demonic responded to Jesus:

NOW THERE WAS A MAN IN THEIR SYNAGOGUE WITH AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT. AND HE CRIED OUT, SAYING, "LET US ALONE! WHAT HAVE WE TO DO WITH YOU, JESUS OF NAZARETH? DID YOU COME TO DESTROY US? I KNOW WHO YOU ARE—THE HOLY ONE OF GOD!"

_MARK 1:23-24 (NKJV)

Notice that the response of the demonic to Jesus was basically, "Leave us alone!" When we start to move in true intercession to tear down strongholds and to free

people from bondage, we will get the same response. When we move in persistence, we not only bother the demonic, but we take back all that it has stolen. As Christians, our hearts can often grow cold and distant from the Lord. One of the primary goals of Jesus-ministry is for each of us to have the heart of Christ. As we tear down strongholds, it is for the purpose of knowing Jesus more and developing his heart.

KEYS TO LIVING WITH A SOFT HEART

1. In order to consistently have a soft heart, we must pour ourselves into discipleship. We need to receive instruction from others, and then turn around and pour that heart and knowledge into others. Reproduction is the name of the game.

2. If we do not give our lives to others, we will not need to intercede on their behalf. It is entirely possible to live our Christian life giving to others but to not have God's heart for them. This is why true intercession is so critical. It keeps us before the Lord, hearing his heart for others. When we are in his court, he speaks to us about what is on his heart.

3. When intercession grows cold in a church, so does the presence of God.

We need to have a much deeper understanding of true intercession.

THERE ARE TWO DISTINCT STYLES OF INTERCESSION:

1. **Warrior.** This type of prayer can be very loud and fights fiercely against the powers of the air (Ephesians 6:18).

2. **Intercession and travail.** This is prayer in which we identify (put ourselves in another's place) with a specific person as we pray. Travail is prayer that calls out to God in a heart cry for mercy. It is the prayer that identifies personally and corporately with a person's sin and says, "Save us, for I am guilty of the same sin" (Daniel 9; Nehemiah 1:6).

IN SCRIPTURE THERE ARE THREE HEBREW WORDS THAT DESCRIBE THIS KIND OF PRAYER:

1. *Yalad*: to labor to birth, to bring forth. It is difficult; it is hard work, toil, sweat, and takes guts and effort.

2. *Chul*: pain and sorrow born in anguish, born in pain. This is more the emotional side of prayer. To grieve, weeping to birth. The emphasis is that our emotions are involved in this kind of prayer.

3. *Odino*: to birth or travail (travail equals the painful or laborious effort).

GOD REQUIRES STRONG DESIRE AND ANGUISH

Why does God require such prayer, such strong desires, such agonizing heart cries?

1. THESE STRONG DESIRES ILLUSTRATE THE STRENGTH OF GOD'S EMOTION. They are a true representation of the feelings of God for the lost. If we have ever been around a person weeping and agonizing for the lost, we have seen how intense Jesus Christ feels about the lost being saved.

I remember being in a prayer time when the person was crying out for so long, in such a deep way, that she was physically panting. This woman actually lost her breath as the amazing love and compassion for souls was birthing through her.

What must the strength of the Lord's emotions be like? If people can pant and wail and cry out, how much more does the Lord? Certainly, even our most gut-wrenching cries would only be a small taste of what the Lord feels for the lost.

2. THESE STRONG DESIRES ARE A RESULT OF KNOWING THAT THE UNSAVED PERSON IS IN GREAT DANGER. It is perfectly reasonable for the one praying to feel so intensely.

For example: If your neighbor's house was burning down, and you knew the whole family of five was about to burn to death, how would you react? Would you keep watching television, finish up dinner, or mow the lawn? No. You would call the fire department on your cell phone while simultaneously running to aid the family. You would pull them from the fire...even at the risk of your own life. Why should you react any differently if your neighbor's eternal destiny is at stake?

3. WHEN THE SOUL BECOMES BURDENED, IT MUST HAVE RELIEF, NO MATTER THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE. This relief can only come through obedience in prayer. God gives us burdens to draw us closer to his heart. Pride stands in the way of such "foolish" praying because it is more concerned with outward appearance than obedience.

4. AGONIZING FORMS A STRONG BOND BETWEEN JESUS AND THE ONE PRAYING. He wants us to experience what he experiences when we pray. The one praying feels and understands the pain of the Father. As a result, we have a greater understanding of the depths of his love.

5. IT IS THE ONLY WAY FOR THE CHURCH TO PROPERLY PREPARE TO STEWARD THE FUTURE HARVEST WITHOUT BECOMING APATHETIC OR RELIGIOUS. Humility is more than a "Christian virtue"; it is a necessity for harvest and evangelism. Harvest is birthed out of the church forcefully removing fear, forgetting reputation, and getting facedown in the dirt. When the church identifies with the lost and their sins, this posture of humility grows their love for the lost, and prepares their heart for future harvest ministry.

HANDS ON

Ask two volunteers who wear roughly the same size shoes to come up to the front. Have each person put the other's shoes on. Then have each person practice praying out loud for the other person.

The goal is to consider the other person's life and to consider earnestly his or her burdens and the roadblocks in his or her way. Practice praying with greater passion.

What are the key characteristics of an intercessor?

1. A heart of compassion.
2. A heart for the lost and the broken.

A little review. Intercession has two sides:

1. The warrior side (often the easier of the two).
2. The mercy and compassion side of seeing the lost and the broken, and standing in the gap for them through prayer.

This exercise will help you confront:

1. The fear of man.
2. Passivity.
3. Self-preoccupation.
4. Apathy.
5. Hesitation and timidity.

Separate into small groups and have everyone practice this for one minute, praying for the person next to them by trying to climb into the other person's shoes.

INTERCESSION MUST BE CONSUMING

When does mere petition prayer turn into intercession and travail? This happens when we come before God to give birth, meaning that we stand before God and cry out for him to act in our city or nation. This time of prayer consumes our whole body; there is a deep passion and compassion that drives us.

CHRIST IS OUR EXAMPLE:

Jesus was the perfect intercessor. Read Matthew 6–7.

Some characteristics of the prayer of travail:

1. Something impacts and grips us deeply.
2. We have a choice about whether or not we allow it to come forth, or to ignore it.
3. There is weeping, crying, and deep grief over what God reveals.
4. And there is a sense of joy when it is complete.

I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, YOU WILL WEEP AND MOURN WHILE THE WORLD REJOICES. YOU WILL GRIEVE, BUT YOUR GRIEF WILL TURN TO JOY. *_JOHN 16:20 (NIV)*

Other examples of Christ's intercession in Scripture:

We see Jesus demonstrating this heart in the Gospels. Jesus wept over the condition of Jerusalem. He cried because the people did not understand his love for them.

THEREFORE, WHEN JESUS SAW HER WEeping, AND THE JEWS WHO CAME WITH HER WEeping, HE GROANED IN THE SPIRIT AND WAS TROUBLED.

_JOHN 11:33 (NKJV)

Jesus saw Mary weeping over the death of Lazarus, and he was filled with compassion. With a loud shout, he commanded Lazarus to come back to life. The prayer came from deep compassion. He was moved by the heart of love and mercy he had for that family, and Lazarus was resurrected.

THEN JESUS, AGAIN GROANING IN HIMSELF, CAME TO THE TOMB. IT WAS A CAVE, AND A STONE LAY AGAINST IT.

_JOHN 11:38 (NKJV)

Here are some important principles to remember about travail:

1. TRAVAIL OVERRIDES OUR PRIORITIES

HANNAH WAS PRAYING IN HER HEART, AND HER LIPS WERE MOVING BUT HER VOICE WAS NOT HEARD. ELI THOUGHT SHE WAS DRUNK... *_1 SAMUEL 1:13 (NIV)*

Hannah was so consumed with travail to give birth to a son that Eli thought she was drunk. Her groaning was so deep, her passion so strong, no words could even

escape her mouth. Eli said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine" (vs. 14). He had obviously never seen someone pray like that before. She was emotionally distraught and physically incapacitated, which normally would indicate drunkenness. We must learn this truth. Travail was uncommon, even for a priest of God.

2. PUSHING THROUGH TO COMPLETION.

When most women give birth, they hope for a short labor. No right-minded woman would want a long labor. In the same way, no woman can decide to just get up and walk away in the middle of the labor. They have to hang in there and have the baby no matter the time, anguish, or cost involved. So it must be with us in intercession.

In 1 Kings 18, we find Elijah move actively in intercessory prayer. In the following passage of Scripture, Elijah perseveres on the mountain until he gives birth to what the Lord has said.

AND IT CAME TO PASS AFTER MANY DAYS THAT THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO ELIJAH, IN THE THIRD YEAR, SAYING, "GO, PRESENT YOURSELF TO AHAB, AND I WILL SEND RAIN ON THE EARTH."

_1 KINGS 18:1 (NKJV)

THEN ELIJAH SAID TO AHAB, "GO UP, EAT AND DRINK; FOR THERE IS THE SOUND OF ABUNDANCE OF RAIN." SO AHAB WENT UP TO EAT AND DRINK. AND ELIJAH WENT UP TO THE TOP OF CARMEL; THEN HE BOWED DOWN ON THE GROUND, AND PUT HIS FACE BETWEEN HIS KNEES, AND SAID TO HIS SERVANT, "GO UP NOW, LOOK TOWARD THE SEA." SO HE WENT UP AND LOOKED, AND SAID, "THERE IS NOTHING." AND SEVEN TIMES HE SAID, "GO AGAIN." THEN IT CAME TO PASS THE SEVENTH TIME, THAT HE SAID,

"THERE IS A CLOUD, AS SMALL AS A MAN'S HAND, RISING OUT OF THE SEA!" SO HE SAID, "GO UP, SAY TO AHAB, 'PREPARE YOUR CHARIOT, AND GO DOWN BEFORE THE RAIN STOPS YOU.'" NOW IT HAPPENED IN THE MEANTIME THAT THE SKY BECAME BLACK WITH CLOUDS AND WIND, AND THERE WAS A HEAVY RAIN. SO AHAB RODE AWAY AND WENT TO JEZREEL. THEN THE HAND OF THE LORD CAME UPON ELIJAH; AND HE GIRDED UP HIS LOINS AND RAN AHEAD OF AHAB TO THE ENTRANCE OF JEZREEL.

_1 KINGS 18:41-46 (NKJV)

There are several key principles in this passage:

Read 1 Kings 18:1 again.

A. INTERCESSION BEGINS WITH THE WORD OF THE LORD.

As the word of God enters our hearts and mixes with our faith, a divine conception takes place. Elijah heard the Word of the Lord: "I will send rain."

B. HE HEARD THE WORD, AND IT IMPACTED HIS SPIRIT.

THEN ELIJAH SAID TO AHAB, "GO UP, EAT AND DRINK; FOR THERE IS THE SOUND OF ABUNDANCE OF RAIN." WAS IT RAINING? NO. AND ELIJAH DOES NOT SAY THERE WILL BE THE SOUND OF RAIN; RATHER, HE SAYS THERE IS THE SOUND OF RAIN. HE IS SPEAKING WITH EYES OF FAITH, HEARING THE RAIN IN HIS SPIRIT, IN RESPONSE TO THE WORD HE HEARD FROM GOD. *_1 KINGS 18:41*

C. HE IMMEDIATELY MOVED INTO THE PLACE OF FAITH.

He moved to the type of faith that says, "I know that I know that I know." This is the key of intercession. Certainty of faith cannot be overlooked or forgotten.

SO WHO ARE YOU: AHAB OR ELIJAH?

You have a choice. When God speaks, you can have two basic reactions. You can be Ahab, or you can be Elijah.

1. Ahab went to eat, drink, and be merry. Like Ahab, we can hear the word of the Lord and believe it is not all that special. We can think, “Well, God is going to do it, so let’s just celebrate.” But Elijah knew what he had to do. Ahab was filled with passivity and rebellion, so he ignored what God spoke through Elijah.

2. Elijah went to the top of Mount Carmel and put his face between his knees and began to cry out to God. Why is the Bible so specific about the posture of prayer Elijah took? Because the position he prayed from was the classic birthing position of the time. Elijah placed himself in the position of birthing intercession and would not relent until what he had heard in his spirit was birthed in the physical. In Bible times they knew just what this position meant.

“God, I know it is going to rain, but I don’t just want it in the Spirit realm, I want to feel the rain on my physical body too.”

...AND SAID TO HIS SERVANT, “GO UP NOW, LOOK TOWARD THE SEA.” SO HE WENT UP AND LOOKED, AND SAID, “THERE IS NOTHING.” AND SEVEN TIMES HE SAID, “GO AGAIN.” THEN IT CAME TO PASS THE SEVENTH TIME, THAT HE SAID, “THERE IS A CLOUD, AS SMALL AS A MAN’S HAND, RISING OUT OF THE SEA!” SO HE SAID, “GO UP, SAY TO AHAB, ‘PREPARE YOUR CHARIOT, AND GO DOWN BEFORE THE RAIN STOPS YOU.’”

_1 KINGS 18:43-44 (NKJV)

What happened to Elijah in this passage will always happen to us when we obey the Lord in this type of prayer. Notice that the servant of Elijah came back and said he saw “nothing.” We will usually encounter this when we are in birthing prayer. Our friends will come to us and say, “What are you praying for? Can’t you see nothing has changed?” After the seventh time of saying “Go again,” however, there was breakthrough. God

has the perfect moment for everything, and it is on his timetable, not ours. Our job is to travail until his work is finished.

Notice Elijah’s passion here. He had courage before God, and he kept “shoving and pushing” in the place of prayer. Every time his servant came back and said, “There is nothing,” Elijah said in his spirit, “Oh, there is something—and it will be birthed.”

It is critical to note that persevering prayer is not a prayer of repetition; it is not saying the same thing over and over and over again. There is a progression in persevering prayer that pushes through by faith. Persevering prayer is not saying the same thing five hundred times. Persevering prayer moves from a place of petition (Oh God, I hear that word), to a place of knowing (I know it and believe it), until finally it gets to a place of thanksgiving (I thank you for it). There is a momentum to it, an acceleration.

NOW IT HAPPENED IN THE MEANTIME THAT THE SKY BECAME BLACK WITH CLOUDS AND WIND, AND THERE WAS A HEAVY RAIN. SO AHAB RODE AWAY AND WENT TO JEZREEL. *_1 KINGS 18:45 (NKJV)*

When we know the Lord has called us to pray, we must let our spirit become moved with compassion when he gives us the word. Let the Lord bring it to completion in his perfect timing, and then enjoy the fruit of the labor. There is nothing more thrilling than to touch and hold the fruit of our travail. What a joy beyond description.

KEY COMPONENTS OF WHITE-HOT TRAVAILING PRAYER IN YOUR DAILY LIFE

1. A heart cry for salvation. A heart for people, cities, and the lost to be rescued.
2. A heart for deliverance, to set the captives free.
3. An appeal and cry for mercy in times of God’s judgment. “Put on sackcloth” that God will not judge the people.

INTERCESSION "HANDS-ON" EXERCISE

Teacher: use a projector to put Isaiah 61–62 on the wall.

Pray Isaiah 61 out loud together. Between each chapter, spend five minutes crying out to God for the following topics. Ask the Lord to save them and bring them into the church. **Ask the Lord for boldness to go out and speak the love of Christ to:**

1. Single moms.
2. Drug addicts.
3. College students.
4. Young people who work in your city.

Now pray Isaiah 62 out loud.

Cry out for five minutes for God to do the following in the church:

1. A heightened desperation for God.
2. Radical repentance.
3. An outpouring of salvation.
4. Healing of the emotions and the heart.
5. Physical healing.
6. A sense of urgency.
7. A release of the fear of God.
8. God-centered versus man-centered priorities.
9. Great authority to be released upon God's teachers and ministers.
10. Hearts to soften by God's presence, and that an outpouring of gifts would result.
11. That prayer would become a constant.
12. A strong dependence on the leading of God's Spirit.

PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

ONE DAY JESUS WAS PRAYING IN A CERTAIN PLACE. WHEN HE FINISHED, ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES SAID TO HIM, "LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY, JUST AS JOHN TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES." HE SAID TO THEM, "WHEN YOU PRAY, SAY: 'FATHER, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME, YOUR KINGDOM COME. GIVE US EACH DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. FORGIVE US OUR SINS, FOR WE ALSO FORGIVE EVERYONE WHO SINS AGAINST US. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION.'" THEN HE SAID TO THEM, "SUPPOSE ONE OF YOU HAS A FRIEND, AND HE GOES TO HIM AT MIDNIGHT AND SAYS, 'FRIEND, LEND ME THREE LOAVES OF BREAD, BECAUSE A FRIEND OF MINE ON A JOURNEY HAS COME TO ME, AND I HAVE NOTHING TO SET BEFORE HIM.' THEN THE ONE INSIDE ANSWERS, 'DON'T BOTHER ME. THE DOOR IS ALREADY LOCKED, AND MY CHILDREN ARE WITH ME IN BED. I CAN'T GET UP AND GIVE YOU ANYTHING.' I TELL YOU, THOUGH HE WILL NOT GET UP AND GIVE HIM THE BREAD BECAUSE HE IS HIS FRIEND, YET BECAUSE OF THE MAN'S BOLDNESS HE WILL GET UP AND GIVE HIM AS MUCH AS HE NEEDS. SO I SAY TO YOU: ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU; SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND; KNOCK AND THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED TO YOU. FOR EVERYONE WHO ASKS RECEIVES; HE WHO SEEKS FINDS; AND TO HIM WHO KNOCKS, THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED. WHICH OF YOU FATHERS, IF YOUR SON ASKS FOR A FISH, WILL GIVE HIM A SNAKE INSTEAD? OR IF HE ASKS FOR AN EGG, WILL GIVE HIM A SCORPION? 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." *_LUKE 11:1-15 (NIV)*

Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray IN Supplication

Today, we will examine the story that Jesus told his disciples in response to their question about how to pray. When they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, they were probably not expecting to be told a story. The story Jesus tells, however, clearly emphasizes the need for persistence in prayer. It is through persistence that God can begin to purify our desires. He wants the type of prayer that is drained of self and is in complete agreement with his will. There are five distinct stages to this type of prayer that we will want to examine and understand more clearly.

STAGE 1: MAKING THE DECISION TO ASK ON A CONSISTENT BASIS

When we first begin to learn about the Lord, we make most of our decisions on our own. It may be helpful to ask yourself this question: "How many decisions do I make during the course of my day that I don't run by anyone?" Most of us do what we want, go where we want, and buy what we want, without ever asking anyone. Prayer happens only as a last resort—after our own decisions have put us into a crisis.

The first stage is to _____.¹

As simple as it sounds, the first step is to make the consistent decision to ask the Lord what he wants you to do. Most people make plans first and then ask God to bless their plans. This type of prayer pattern is counter-productive, however.

LEADER NOTE:

Have the class get into their small groups and answer the following questions:

Question #1: What decisions did you make this week that you did not ask the Lord about?

Question #2: Name some areas in your life where you would like to seek the Lord's will.

STAGE 2: WANTING TO HEAR THE ANSWER ONCE YOU ASK

It takes a wholehearted ear and a determined heart to hear the whisper of God's voice.

"BE STILL," HE SAYS, "AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD." *_PSALM 46:10 (NIV)*

The Lord does not require us to do anything or go anywhere in order to meet with him. Rather, his simple command to us is to be still in his presence—cease our own efforts and all that distracts us so he can reveal himself more fully. There is a sense of hearing beyond the natural capacity. When Jesus said to his disciples, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears," he was referring to the ear of the spirit, which is the inner man (Luke 9:44, NIV).

The second stage is to _____.²

We learn to discern the voice of God by actively listening to him. The more time we spend in his presence, with a desire to hear from him, the more we are able to recognize his voice. Hebrews 5:14 says that our spiritual senses are sharpened "by constant use" (that is, with learned experience).

BUT SOLID FOOD IS FOR THE MATURE, WHO BY CONSTANT USE HAVE TRAINED THEMSELVES TO DISTINGUISH GOOD FROM EVIL. *_HEBREWS 5:14 (NIV)*

In the same way, repeatedly refusing to respond to the call of the Spirit results in a spiritual condition that leaves our hearts hardened before him—calloused, so to speak—and insensitive to his voice. This condition grieves the heart of God.

SO, AS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYS: "TODAY, IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS YOU DID IN THE REBELLION, DURING THE TIME OF TESTING IN THE DESERT, WHERE YOUR FATHERS TESTED AND TRIED ME AND FOR FORTY YEARS SAW WHAT I DID. THAT IS WHY I WAS ANGRY WITH THAT GENERATION,

AND I SAID, 'THEIR HEARTS ARE ALWAYS GOING ASTRAY, AND THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN MY WAYS.'" *_HEBREW 3:7-10 (NIV)*

To maintain an adequate level of spiritual sensitivity, we must learn to respond without delay to the voice of the Spirit of God. God requires an immediate response within the hearts of his people. This is why it says, "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Hebrews 3:15).

SEEK THE LORD WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND; CALL ON HIM WHILE HE IS NEAR. *_ISAIAH 55:6 (NIV)*

WE MUST PAY MORE CAREFUL ATTENTION, THEREFORE, TO WHAT WE HAVE HEARD, SO THAT WE DO NOT DRIFT AWAY... *_HEBREWS 2:1 (NIV)*

Jesus continually repeated himself because his words often fell on deaf ears. At least eight times in the Gospels we read of him exhorting the people, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear." This same verse is also quoted eight times in the book of Revelation. Even though each of the seven churches of Revelation was at a different stage in the development of their spiritual experience, Jesus' invitation to them was the same: "He that has an ear, let him hear..." (Revelation 2:7).

To each of the seven churches Jesus was, in effect, saying, "There is more to hear." All but one had either settled for less than the Lord had for them, or had fallen away, and he wanted them to move forward. Many in our own day have become satisfied with the knowledge that they will someday inherit the promise of eternal life. However, this knowledge is barely enough to get them through the here and now. In contrast, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24, NIV). His promises are not for someday in the future; they are for now.

If this present life is to have any meaning or purpose at all, we must learn to come to know him with whom we will spend eternity. Unless we learn to know his voice and to have fellowship with him now, we will never

experience the abundant life of which Jesus spoke (John 10:10).

God's greatest complaint in this matter is not with the unregenerate world, for he does not expect nonbelievers to have respect for his word—they are "uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts 7:51); rather, the Lord's deepest concern is for his own people—those who have the ability to hear but refuse to listen. They "have ears to hear and hear not." Many have "stopped their ears" and have, by choice, turned "away their ears" from hearing the word of the Lord, while others have simply become "dull of hearing."

WE HAVE MUCH TO SAY ABOUT THIS, BUT IT IS HARD TO EXPLAIN BECAUSE YOU ARE SLOW TO LEARN. *_HEBREWS 5:11 (NIV)*

"THE DAYS ARE COMING," DECLARES THE SOVEREIGN LORD, "WHEN I WILL SEND A FAMINE THROUGH THE LAND—NOT A FAMINE OF FOOD OR A THIRST FOR WATER, BUT A FAMINE OF HEARING THE WORDS OF THE LORD." *_AMOS 8:11 (NIV)*

Churches are plentiful; the Word of God has gone forth—but there is a famine of hearing his voice. We see that the famine mentioned in Amos 8:11 is "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

God has not stopped speaking to his people; the problem is that his people have failed to listen to his voice. When the message becomes too demanding, many try to avoid the issue by seeking an escape, which is any excuse that will allow them to continue in their own ways. However, the claim upon our lives remains the same, and we cannot find true and lasting peace apart from obedience to God's plan.

We must beware lest our hearts be overcome by an attitude of complacency and spiritual laziness. The Lord does not usually call at a "convenient" time. Unless we keep watch and are ready, ever listening for his voice, we will miss out. Moreover, as long as we consider his calling an inconvenience, we will only be met by disappointment.

I ROSE UP TO OPEN TO MY BELOVED... BUT MY BELOVED HAD WITHDRAWN HIMSELF, AND WAS GONE: MY SOUL FAILED WHEN HE SPOKE; I SOUGHT HIM, BUT I COULD NOT FIND HIM; I CALLED HIM, BUT HE GAVE NO ANSWER.

_SONG OF SONGS 5:5-6 (NIV)

How can we better hear God's voice? As it is in the natural, Paul says, so it is in the spiritual. When we have trouble hearing the voice of God, we can (1) get closer to the speaker; or (2) we can close out the distracting sounds or voices that interfere or compete for our attention. In other words, often the problem is not in the hearing, or even in the listening, but in discerning God's voice.

LEADER NOTE:

Have small groups confess not listening to God's voice. Confess any passivity, apathy, or independence that keeps them from being still and knowing him.

Question #1: Do you really want to hear what God would say about any subject in your life? Is there a specific subject you know you are withholding from God?

Question #2: Have you ever been asked a question by a person who really did not want to know the answer? Describe this situation with your small group.

Question #3: Do you have a difficult time hearing the Lord's voice? What stands in the way of hearing from the Lord in a clearer way?

(Small group leader note: If someone has trouble hearing God's voice, you may want to spend some time with them outside of class. Begin with the spiritual blockers, which is any known sin that still needs to be confessed; then move into practical problem solving.)

STAGE 3: FERVENCY—THE FIRST SIGNS OF DESPERATION IN THE PLACE OF PRAYER

As we move further into the heart of Christ through prayer, there are several things that begin to happen. First, Christ will purify our desires. Our spiritual muscle builds as we discipline ourselves and press into prayer, regardless of what our eyes see.

Imagine, for just a moment, a person going to the gym three times a week versus someone who goes only once a month. There is really no change in a person's body by lifting weights one time a month. However, the one who disciplines himself to continually work out each and every week will find significant changes as he increasingly gets in shape. Likewise, we change when we pray consistently and with passion. Our faith and perseverance begin to birth God's character within us; we find ourselves being transformed through prayer.

The third stage is _____³ marked with _____⁴ and _____⁵.

Fervent prayer comes from those who are filled with passion and zeal. There is a consistency and sincerity that marks their prayer life. They really want everything the Lord wants, no matter the cost. They are desperate to please the Lord and desperate to see change in and around them. This kind of prayer does not come out of the flesh because it requires the Holy Spirit to assist and motivate the believer in prayer.

LEADER NOTE:

Break into small groups again and ask the questions below. Each group will need strong leadership in order to facilitate discussion.

Question #1: What promises has the Lord given that you pray for fervently?

Question #2: Seek the Lord as a group for the following:

1. Pray for each person in your group to determine what biblical promises the Lord wants the individual to pray into consistently.
2. Decide as a group when you can get together to pray about the promises over each person's life.

STAGE 4: DETERMINATION AND POUNDING— UNRELENTING PERSISTENCE

I TELL YOU, THOUGH HE WILL NOT GET UP AND GIVE HIM THE BREAD BECAUSE HE IS HIS FRIEND, YET BECAUSE OF THE MAN'S BOLDNESS HE WILL GET UP AND GIVE HIM AS MUCH AS HE NEEDS. SO I SAY TO YOU: ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU; SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND; KNOCK AND THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED TO YOU. FOR EVERYONE WHO ASKS RECEIVES; HE WHO SEEKS FINDS; AND TO HIM WHO KNOCKS, THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED. *_LUKE 11:8-15 (NIV)*

Jesus taught the disciples that boldness and perseverance are required if prayer is to be effective. There are many prayers that begin with impure motives and selfish agendas. However, as we move into a greater determination to carry out God's will, our prayers change from, "This is what I want and I need it now," to "Jesus, what is it that you want? Show me how to pray in accordance with your will." Once his will is known, we do not quit pounding on the door.

The fourth stage is relentless _____,⁶ which _____⁷ our motives.

Remember, through prayer God transforms our hearts to beat like his. We are changed. Without engaging in prayer, we remain fundamentally self-absorbed in our Christian walk. Our only prayers revolve around our lives and they rarely include the needs of others. For example, if we are praying to have God's heart for others, it will take more than a two-minute prayer time every thirty days. If we are praying for the lost to be saved, the Lord will ensure that we become broken over the condition of the lost before he answers that prayer. If we are praying to be filled with God's authority and power to do Jesus-ministry, the Lord will ensure that our will is broken and submitted fully to his. If we are praying for the sick to be healed, the Lord will guarantee that we understand suffering and develop mercy in the process.

It is important to understand that we have to make a willful decision to pray in a determined and bold manner. There will be many times when we will not want to pray, but we will need to pray. Self-doubt will come against our determination, and it will require a firm stance against the enemy to refuse the temptation to quit. The enemy will say, "What is this for anyway? Why are you praying for something God will never answer?" However, as we press through the enemy's strongholds of doubt and unbelief, our character is strengthened.

NOT ONLY SO, BUT WE ALSO REJOICE IN OUR SUFFERINGS, BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT SUFFERING PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE; PERSEVERANCE, CHARACTER; AND CHARACTER, HOPE. AND HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT US, BECAUSE GOD HAS Poured OUT HIS LOVE INTO OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM HE HAS GIVEN US. *_ROMANS 5:3-4 (NIV)*

CONSIDER IT ALL JOY, MY BRETHREN, WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER VARIOUS TRIALS, KNOWING THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE. AND LET ENDURANCE HAVE ITS PERFECT RESULT, SO THAT YOU MAY BE PERFECT AND COMPLETE, LACKING IN NOTHING. *_JAMES 1:2-4 (NASB)*

You will be challenged; you need to know that going in. The world and its priorities will attempt to choke your passion to see God move. Like weights, God allows challenges to gradually be added to the bar each day in weight lifting. The Lord builds the ones he has called—making us much stronger. Then our hearts will be ready to receive the marvellous answers to the prayers that we believed in faith would happen.

Our persistent knocking can become frustrating when our timing does not line up with the Lord's. He knows that there is buried anger and he allows the process of prayer to unearth what is deep in our hearts. Peace will take the place of exasperation if we allow the Lord to purify our desires with his refiner's fire. Once the door is opened, we will not be heard saying, "It's about time, God." Instead, we will be filled with praise and thanksgiving over the faithfulness and perfect timing of our God.

LEADER NOTE:

Break into small groups to answer the following questions.

Question #1: What practical steps will you take to make intercession a weekly discipline?

Question #2: How would eliminating television and movies from your life allow prayer to blossom?

Question #3: What are some worship CDs you currently own? Have you ever listened to worship music while you were praying?

Question #4: Have you ever gone on a prayer walk in your city, asking for God's heart as your eyes are opened to the many needs of the people?

HOMework

1. Make time in your schedule for daily intercession.
2. Spend some time every day this week praying for the things the Lord has promised you individually.
3. Meet as a small group to pray over one another's promises from God.
4. Using Isaiah 58:6–12 as your guide, pray every day for your city. If you do not feel a passion for the things listed there, ask the Lord to birth that passion in your heart.

IS NOT THIS THE KIND OF FASTING I HAVE CHOSEN: TO LOOSE THE CHAINS OF INJUSTICE AND UNTIE THE CORDS OF THE YOKE, TO SET THE OPPRESSED FREE AND BREAK EVERY YOKE? IS IT NOT TO SHARE YOUR FOOD WITH THE HUNGRY AND TO PROVIDE THE POOR WANDERER WITH SHELTER—WHEN YOU SEE THE NAKED, TO CLOTHE HIM, AND NOT TO TURN AWAY FROM YOUR OWN FLESH AND BLOOD? THEN YOUR LIGHT WILL BREAK FORTH LIKE THE DAWN, AND YOUR HEALING WILL QUICKLY APPEAR; THEN YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL GO

BEFORE YOU, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD WILL BE YOUR REAR GUARD. THEN YOU WILL CALL, AND THE LORD WILL ANSWER; YOU WILL CRY FOR HELP, AND HE WILL SAY: "HERE AM I." IF YOU DO AWAY WITH THE YOKE OF OPPRESSION, WITH THE POINTING FINGER AND MALICIOUS TALK, AND IF YOU SPEND YOURSELVES IN BEHALF OF THE HUNGRY AND SATISFY THE NEEDS OF THE OPPRESSED, THEN YOUR LIGHT WILL RISE IN THE DARKNESS, AND YOUR NIGHT WILL BECOME LIKE THE NOONDAY. THE LORD WILL GUIDE YOU ALWAYS; HE WILL SATISFY YOUR NEEDS IN A SUN-SCORCHED LAND AND WILL STRENGTHEN YOUR FRAME. YOU WILL BE LIKE A WELL-WATERED GARDEN, LIKE A SPRING WHOSE WATERS NEVER FAIL. YOUR PEOPLE WILL REBUILD THE ANCIENT RUINS AND WILL RAISE UP THE AGE-OLD FOUNDATIONS; YOU WILL BE CALLED REPAIRER OF BROKEN WALLS, RESTORER OF STREETS WITH DWELLINGS. *ISAIAH 58:6-12 (NIV)*

KEY

1. ask for God's input
2. listen for his answer
3. fervency
4. consistency
5. passion
6. persistence
7. purifies

CR Circuit
Riders