

BUILDING

AN ALTAR

PRAYER

MINISTRY TEAM

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WHY WE PRAY

Every day the news reports disasters and tragedies of every kind. These events range from personal to national to international. Accidents take lives unexpectedly. Murders take lives deliberately. Stories plaster the pages about relationships ravaged. On the same page runs an account of someone who made a fortune and another who lost it.

Yet these are merely the stories that make the news. In only slightly less dramatic fashion, personal crises litter lives all around us. No one is exempt—including us. Everyone bears wounds. Everyone encounters disappointments and defeats. Everyone runs into roadblocks for their dreams.

But the crises are not the reason *why* we pray.

In this troubled and frustrated world cascading, we stop and pray for one primary reason above all. What is this supreme reason for prayer? It is nothing less than the affirmation that in a world so marked by struggle, we still hope the struggles are not our fundamental reality. We pray because we believe God is our fundamental reality. Not the murders. Not the accidents. Not the financial disasters (or any successes, for that matter).

Even those who do not believe whisper a prayer in desperate times. These people in their extremity at least hope that somewhere there may be a God who can take things that are falling apart and put them back together. Maybe there is a God who can make sense out of life when it seems senseless. Maybe there is a God who can bring hope when life seems hopeless.

God is our fundamental reality. That is why we pray. Prayer affirms that life's origin is in God and its goal is in God. Prayer affirms that he is in the most basic and substantive sense the Alpha and Omega of our lives. The true reality of our lives is not the seen but the unseen.

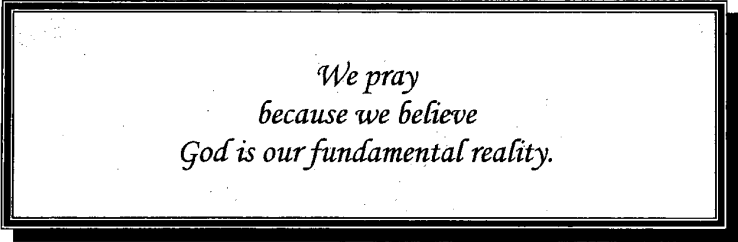
Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16-18 NIV)

We pray because we affirm neither people nor circumstances have the last word; God does. We take Jesus seriously when he says, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."* (Mark 13:31 NIV)

We pray because we affirm the forces of evil do not have the last word. Scripture reminds us we are not in a neutral world. *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* (Eph. 6:12 NIV)

We pray because we fully expect God to answer the prayer Jesus taught his disciples through all ages to pray, *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."* (Matt. 6:10 KJV)

* * * * *



*We pray
because we believe
God is our fundamental reality.*

THE TOOLBOX

So many of our experiences are conditioned by what we expect. When we bite a banana, we expect it to be soft. When we bite a chip, we expect it to crunch. But when the banana crunches or the chip is soggy, we are ready to spew it out of our mouths!

In the movie *Bruce Almighty*, Bruce gives his girlfriend a wonderful day that begins at the spa and culminates with dinner at the most romantic restaurant in town. The girlfriend's sister assures her this can mean only one thing—he is going to propose to her. As it turns out, he only breaks her the news that he has gotten the big promotion he has always wanted. She says, "That's great, honey!" but everything about her signals profound disappointment. Was the spa less special, the restaurant less romantic, the dinner less delicious? No. But her expectation of something greater led to her disappointment.

With that picture in mind, I want to be straightforward on what you can expect in this manual. If you expect a simple "how-to" handbook that catalogues an easy way to put God in a box, you will be disappointed. If you look here for nifty techniques and gimmicks to help you accomplish deft feats in prayer, you will be disappointed. If you are looking for a shortcut that provides instant power in prayer, you will be disappointed.

What you can expect are some guidelines to help intercessors pray more effectively. I hold no illusion that all wisdom on the subject resides here. Much more to the point, I pray this will spark further insights in individuals and teams that will make this a growing area of emphasis and passion in churches.

I have chosen to use the image of a toolbox. No mechanic or carpenter is content with a lone tool. The toolbox provides the variety of resources needed each in its own time. A wrench is perfect for certain work but useless when you need a screwdriver. The worker reaches into the toolbox for the appropriate tool at the appropriate time. Or to change the image, no golfer would dream of stepping onto the course with a single club. Whether on the tee, the green, or the fairway, the appropriate club is needed.

What you will find here is a toolbox of ideas and insights. Instead of providing a clever technique or single method, I am providing an assortment of useful and practical tools that you can use in intercessory prayer. When you pray with someone, God

will guide you to pull out the tool appropriate for the moment. You will pray differently for a person wrestling with an addiction than you will for a person who is grieving over a lost spouse. You will pray differently for a person who comes for salvation than for one who comes for physical or emotional healing.

So I invite you to dig into the toolbox. When you get to the end of it, you will find what may be the greatest thing of all—plenty of room for you to add more tools as God shows them to you.

Bob

NOTE: All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

PRAYER IS OUR FIRST—NOT LAST—RESORT

Danny Thomas had fallen on hard times. Desperate about his future, he knelt and prayed, asking the help of St. Jude. Why him? Judas Thaddeus was one of the twelve disciples. Though we know almost nothing specific about him, tradition has dubbed him the patron saint of lost causes. Not long after, things turned around for Danny Thomas. But unlike so many, Thomas did not forget his prayer.

Some years later, Thomas decided to create a hospital that would be the best of its kind in research to help children in need. Where better could they go than to a place named after the patron saint of lost causes? So it was that St. Jude Children's Hospital was born. Danny Thomas had an excellent career, but St. Jude will always be his true legacy.¹

Regrettably, many look on prayer as a kind of St. Jude of life. If our own effort and planning comes to nothing, if our wisdom and insight is fruitless, if our resources and strength fail, *then* we will turn to prayer. The implication is that we trust ourselves more than God. In football terms, if we can't win the game outright, we resort to the "Hail Mary" pass on the last play and hope for the best, but don't really expect much.

Prayer is not our last resort. As the people of God, we affirm that prayer is our first resort. We do not go to God when all else fails. We are in a world where everything else has failed. That is why we go to the One who will never fail us.

Prayer reminds us that the world is not our ultimate reality; God is. Prayer roots our lives in the fertile soil of God's grace. We are not left alone to battle our way through the world by our own strength; we are lifted up by divine mercy.

“At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.’ This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe.” (Heb. 12:26-28)

Our world is shaky. Our nations are shaky. Our future is shaky. *We* are shaky. So what is to be done? Hold onto the unshakable. One recalls the story of the shipwrecked sailor who was found the next morning clinging to a rock. “Didn’t you shake?” someone asked the man. “Yes,” he replied, “but the rock didn’t!” That’s the key.

My father was a missionary to India. He died there at the age of forty-three. As the cancer took its toll, he no longer had the strength to even attend the church where he served as pastor. One Sunday, as my mother went to worship, she asked my dad, “Bill, is there anything you would like me to tell the congregation?” Dad thought for a moment, then responded using the words of the hymnist, “Mary, tell them this:

*My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus blood and righteousness.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand.”²*

In the face of a world that promises more than it can deliver, God delivers everything he promises. He never fails. He never changes. He never deserts us. He is always faithful. He is always merciful. He is always love. It is precisely such a God to whom we come with faith. We approach him as little children running to their loving parents. We cry, “*Abba, Father!*”

We come joyfully because we know he is more eager to give than we are even to ask. “*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*” (Matt. 7:11)

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CHAPTER 1

Vision for Altar Prayer Ministry— Catching a God’s-Eye View

Day 1

In his delightful book, *God’s-Eye View*, Tommy Tenney tells about taking his little daughter on an airplane ride. Though she had flown many times before, this was the first time she really looked out of the window and gazed at the world below. “Wook, Daddy,” she exclaimed, “Widdle houses, widdle cars, widdle people!”

Tenney said he tried to explain to her that the houses, cars and people were not miniaturized. They only appeared that way because of the perspective provided from that height. Needless to say, his explanation was lost on the pint-sized girl who was convinced everything had shrunk!

Then it struck Tenney that God has a similar perspective on the things of earth. What we see as so all consuming from our perspective may be quite small from God’s or what we see as incomprehensible from our vantage point may fit into a grand master plan from God’s. The key is to catch a God’s-eye view.³

In approaching the subject of altar prayer ministry, we profit as greatly by taking a God’s-eye view. When we open the Bible, we discover uncharted vistas of spiritual depth opened as people pray. The seemingly impossible occurs. The seemingly hopeless happens. Streams flow in the desert. Manna falls. The blind see. The lame leap. The dead live again.

“How does this happen?” we might ask. The answer is simply that in prayer we escape the limitations of human power and tap into the resources of the Almighty. When told she will give birth to the Messiah, though she is a virgin, Mary asks appropriately, “How can this be?” Gabriel replies, “*Nothing is impossible with God.*” (Luke 1:37) Gabriel helped Mary catch a God’s-eye view.

Our persistent problem is that we get stuck in seeing things from our perspective, not God’s. Consequently, we despair when help is at hand, we give up when victory is around the

corner, and we quit climbing when the summit is almost in reach. The reason is that we can't see it.

A swimmer set out to cross the English Channel. On the verge of completing the exhausting challenge, the swimmer gave up and was pulled into the boat, despite the fact the people on the boat told him he was almost there. The problem? A terrible fog that day obscured the visibility. Later on the swimmer commented, "If I could have seen the shore, I could have made it." On another attempt, he did.

The sad thing is that we have frequently become so accustomed to our routine that we hardly see above the level of our own effort or customs. But the truth remains that we intuitively know God is about more than our customs. We cherish the Lamb of God but forget that he is also the Lion of Judah. In C. S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, we meet God in the form of Aslan, the great lion. Lewis reminds us wisely ^{that he} He is not a tame lion. But we have tried to domesticate him. We have tried to make him tame instead of letting him make us courageous.

God, however, refuses to fit into our neat molds and categories. He continues to move in remarkable ways that demonstrate his greatness and majesty. He beckons to all of us—faint of heart, though we are—calling us to follow him into greatness. Our call is nothing less than to be part of the answer to Jesus' prayer, "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matt. 6:10 KJV).

When/where have you heard of people in modern times encountering Christ in powerful ways that transformed their lives?

When/how have you encountered Christ in powerful ways that transformed your life?

[NOTE: Seeing diverse ways in which people have met God in ways that transformed their lives in no way denigrates one tradition nor does it exalt another. God works in wonderfully varied ways to accomplish his purposes. Neither is this chasing after signs or experiences. Jesus said, “*This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign*” (Luke 11:29 NIV). Rather, we are praying for a divine discontent that longs for more of God. What we sometimes mistake for peace can be a deadly complacency. Let us pray for more of God’s grace!]

See who was changed in powerful encounters with Christ:

Acts 2 _____

Acts 3 _____

Acts 8 _____

Acts 9 _____

Acts 13 _____

Acts 16 _____

Day 2

THE THEME VERSE

“On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers.”

(2 Cor 1:10-11 NIV)

In this passage we find the core of our calling as altar prayer ministers. This theme verse clarifies key dynamics that every altar prayer minister can embrace with joy so as to engage in this with greater confidence and competence.

NOTE: Space is provided for you to include your own insights on each idea.

1. ON HIM we have set our hope.

- Let every person approach this calling with humility. Let no one approach this calling with fear. It is God's work, not ours. It is **on him** we have set our hope.
- The prayer event very clearly focuses on God. It does not focus on the problem, on the person with the problem, or on the intercessor. The focus is always on God.
-

2. On him we have set OUR HOPE.

- We come to pray in the presence of God with **hope**. Let no one intercede with despair or without faith. Pray in **hope**.
- Glance at the problem but gaze at God. *He* is our hope.
- "Thou art coming to a king;
large petitions with thee bring.
For his strength and power are such,
none can ever ask too much." (John Newton)
-

3. He will CONTINUE TO DELIVER US.

- **Continue** reminds us that God has always been at work. He is not untested or his power unknown. He is the God who has been *our help in ages past*; that is why he is *our hope for years to come*.
- **Deliver** tells us that God is eager to enter into our lives to save us. He delivers us always, but it is ever in ways that he sees fit. Sometimes he delivers his children *from*; sometimes he delivers his children *through*.
-

4. AS YOU HELP US.

- **Help us** defines the intercessor's role. It is not the intercessor's role to deliver the person; that is God's responsibility. The intercessor becomes a temporary assistant to the Holy Spirit by joining him in his work.
- The intercessor becomes a compassionate companion on the journey of the person in need of prayer. However, the intercessor clearly and persistently points to Jesus as the one who really delivers.
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5. As you help us BY YOUR PRAYERS.

- You help us **by your prayers!** Astonishing that our prayers become a medium of delivering God's grace!
- The intercessor's prayers both: (1) open a channel for God's grace to enter the person's situation and life, and (2) enable a connection so that the person can let the encounter become a lifelong relationship.
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* * * * *

Which of these ideas gives you the most confidence and encouragement? Why?

Day 3**THE THREE FOUR LEGS OF ALTAR PRAYER
MINISTRY**

Years ago, three-wheelers became the latest craze that swept the country. Adults and children loved these off-road vehicles for zooming across fields or through woods. The fad turned bad, however, because the three-wheelers were notoriously unstable. Hit a bad hole, turn too sharply, get on a steep bank and suddenly the three-wheeler was on top of you.

So the industry adapted. Instead of trying to justify the three-wheelers, they switched to making four-wheelers. Adding that extra wheel made all the difference.

Why mention these all-terrain vehicles? Just as the ATV industry moved from three to four wheels, I found my original three-leg basis for altar prayer ministry became far stronger by adding a fourth. In order for the church to embrace altar prayer ministry, I initially considered three strong legs. The three are (1) the value of intercessory prayer, (2) the sacredness of the altar as one holy place to meet God, and (3) the powerful ministry of the laity. To the three, I add a fourth to increase its strength and stability still further. The fourth practical leg is (4) covenant team ministry.

1. *Power of Intercessory Prayer*
2. *Power of the Altar*
3. *Power of Lay Ministry*
4. *Power of Covenant Team Ministry*

Biblical/Theological Foundations

Four intertwining biblical/theological issues undergird altar prayer ministry. Each has a power of its own and stands alone, yet when brought together, a synergistic strength emerges

that can empower the Church and transform the world. The first three themes are the power of intercessory prayer, the power of the altar, and the power of lay ministry. These are dealt with in more detail in subsequent chapters. I add the fourth practical leg of covenant team ministry in the second chapter.

Power of Intercessory Prayer—Theology of Sacred Encounter

Prayer has an indisputable, irreplaceable, and critical place in the life of the believer and the Church. Consider that only once did Jesus explicitly state the purpose of the Temple—the place of worship and the house of God. He threw out the moneychangers and then authoritatively proclaimed, “*My house shall be called a house of prayer*” (Matt. 21:13).

Consider also that no matter the demands of others or his own weariness of body, Jesus always took time aside to pray (Mark 1:35). Because of his intimate relationship with his Father, he could unabashedly but unpretentiously say, “*I do nothing on my own, but I speak what the Father taught me*” (John 8:28 NLT).

Write a brief response to each idea presented below.

E. M. Bounds

“The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men [and women]” (Power Through Prayer)⁵

Tom Albin (Director of the Upper Room Ministries)

Prayer is best seen as relationship.

Unknown

“Prayer is not about getting things from God. It is about getting God—and then we have all things.”

J. H. Jowett

“No, prayer is not always petition, sometimes it is just communion. It is the exquisite ministry of friendship.”⁶

Paul

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10)

Dick Eastman

Prayer is nothing less than intimacy with God. (Hour That Changes the World)⁷

“Prayer is nothing less than intimacy with God” (Eastman). This gets to the very heart of the issue. In prayer, people draw near to God. *“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you”* (Jas. 4:8). However, James will not let the matter rest. Prayer is not simply for one’s own benefit. In the following chapter, he counsels those who are sick to call elders to come and minister to them (Jas. 5:13-16). God grants believers the gift of intercession for others. Paul practiced it (Eph. 1:17; 3:13, 16, 18) and asked for it (Eph. 6:18-20). Above all, scripture notes that Jesus practiced it (John 17:9), demonstrated it (Luke 22:31-32), and counseled it (Mark 9:28-29).

The Church has always practiced intercessory prayer because the church is supremely convinced God listens and that God will act. *“Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you do not know”* (Jer. 33:3). In Acts, the Church is found consistently and persistently at prayer. Of course, the Holy Spirit came on believers praying together (Acts 2:42). Peter was set free from jail in response to the prayers of God’s faithful even though they seem astonished that God heard them (Acts 12:1-19). Paul and Barnabas were commissioned with prayer (Acts 13:1-3).

Intercession simply means to take the place of another or to stand on someone else’s behalf. Scripture reveals that God pleads for intercessors. Ezekiel movingly articulates God’s urgent

appeal, “So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found no one” (Ezek. 22:30).

Look up the reference and fill in the blanks.

- _____ interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah to the point of embarrassment (Gen. 18:16-33).
- _____ interceded for the people of Israel by putting his own life on the line (Exod. 32:32).
- _____’s intercession also runs so deeply that he is willing to be blotted out of God’s Book of Life if his Jewish people would come to Christ (Rom. 9:3).

Whether believers choose to embrace it or not, the destiny of others may well depend on their intercession.

- Jesus’ dying on the cross on behalf of a sinful humanity was the greatest act of intercession that ever occurred. There he offered up the ultimate prayer of intercession: “ _____
_____ ” (Luke 23:34).

Intercessory prayer is far more than passionless delivery of a wish list to God; it incorporates the tenacious aspect of spiritual warfare, as well. Sometimes believers need to fight on behalf of those in need because they have an enemy of their souls (Eph. 6:12). Four friends fought through a crowd to bring a companion to Jesus (Mark 2:3). Paul confidently commanded a demon to come out of a woman (Acts 16:18).

That is what **Richard Foster** calls “authoritative prayer”:

In authoritative prayer we are calling forth the will of the Father upon the earth. Here we are not so much speaking to [emphasis mine] God as speaking for [emphasis mine] God. We are not asking God to do something; rather, we are using the authority of God to command something to be done. (Prayer)⁸

What feelings, ideas, and images come to your mind—positive or negative—when you hear the words “authoritative prayer”?

Paul

“Put on the whole armor of God... Pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication” (Eph. 6:11, 18 RSV).

J. H. Jowett

“[I]t is in the field of prayer that life’s critical battles are lost or won.... In prayer we bring our spiritual enemies into the Presence of God and we fight them there.”⁹

Day 4

Power of the Altar—Theology of Sacred Place

In the Bible, the altar is always a crucial place where people can always meet God in transformational power. The word “altar” appears in the Bible 380 times. One can hardly miss its centrality in scripture. It is God’s gift. He provides it as a place where people can come to meet him. Sinful people encounter a holy God at the altar. Apart from the altar, the holiness of God would consume people. Instead, at the altar God makes provision not merely for their survival but also for all to receive mercy, healing, restoration, and hope.

The current use of the word “altar” refers either to:

- ✓ an altar table typically used for candles, communion, or offering plates, or
- ✓ an altar rail where people kneel to pray.

However, the essential understanding of the altar as a sacred place to encounter God remains constant. The encounter at the altar of sacrifice, the encounter at the altar of the Lord's Table for communion, or the encounter in prayer at an altar rail all share the common ground of being places where God meets humanity and extends divine grace.

The Bible is replete with instances too numerous to count in which God met people at the altar. The book of Leviticus offers chapter after chapter on the subject of meeting God at the altar. Every Israelite would have understood the critical nature of the altar. It was nothing less than a place where sinful humanity met a holy God—and received mercy.

Some biblical altars (look up the references):

- When _____ landed after the flood, his first act was to build an altar (Gen. 8:14-22).
- _____ obeyed God in his baffling call to sacrifice Isaac. This act of remarkable obedience takes place at the altar (Gen. 22:1-18).
- When _____ realized he had encountered God, he built an altar at Bethel (Gen. 35:1-7).
- When Israel won a victory over the Amalekites, _____ built an altar (Exod. 17:8-16).
- Absolutely central to the _____ was the altar, where God's presence dwelt and the priests ministered (Exod. 30:17-21).
- Furthermore, one could seize the _____ of the altar and find a place of refuge (1 Kings 1:39-52).
- God showed himself great in power by sending fire from heaven upon the altar _____ built (1 Kings 18:20-40).
- When the _____ returned, they set up the altar so they could offer sacrifices (Ezra 3:1-5).
- _____ reminded the people, however, that the altar was not magic. God desired not just sacrifice but a heart wholly seeking him (Mal. 1:6-10).

- _____ maintained an exalted view of the altar. He affirmed it as a place for those with personal differences to find a way to reconcile and make peace (Matt. 5:19-26).
- At the end of time, _____ painted a picture in Revelation of incense being mingled with the prayers of the saints offered up on the golden altar before the throne of God (Rev. 8:1-4).

Do you have an altar table and/or rail in your church? How is it used? How often?

Does your church offer opportunities for people to meet God in prayer at the altar? If so, what kinds of invitations are given?

Do you have some kind of altar in your home (a place or object)? If so, describe it.

The Church squanders a means of great grace when it fails to embrace the altar, because it has always been a place to meet God. For instance, when Abraham built the altar and prepared to sacrifice Isaac, the central feature was not that the angel stopped him but that God met him. God was waiting for Abraham at the altar. For Abraham to forsake the altar (despite all of its costs) would have been to forsake meeting the Lord. The altar became a geographic, visible locale where Abraham encountered the omnipresent, invisible God.

The altar is a point of departure from sin, a point of contact with God, a place of revelation from God, a place of discovering truth, a place to die to self, a place to find refuge, a place of total surrender, a place of meeting the Advocate, and above all a place of worship.

In the Old Testament, the altar was a place of sacrifice. The innocent died on behalf of a guilty humanity so that atonement was made. In the New Testament, the final sacrifice was made once for all in Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:12). When that happened, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the people was torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). The perfect Sacrifice now opens the altar to all. Furthermore, no longer must they find a mediator. The perfect Sacrifice now becomes the perfect Mediator of God's grace (Heb. 8:6; 12:24). Now access to the Father is available to all.

Day 5

Power of Lay Ministry—Theology of Sacred Calling

“I remember serving a church,” reported a friend, “where the chairs in the chancel area were ornate. But in the midst of it all was what could only be called The Throne. It belonged to the pastor.” One might ask who sits on a throne. The obvious answer is the king. Consequently, if the pastor is the king, everyone else falls into the role of serfs and pawns.¹⁰

*The early church knew nothing but lay ministry.
Everyone was a layperson.*

The early church knew nothing but lay ministry. Everyone was a layperson. All of the disciples were laypersons. The early church recognized the specialized ministry of the apostles, but did not see them as a separate class distinct from all believers. Rather, the disciples were laypeople that received a special calling within the body of believers.

Acts 8:1 notes that the believers scattered from Jerusalem in the face of mounting persecution, but the apostles remained behind. Something remarkable happened in the wake of this dispersion. The gospel spread and new believers emerged. This growth happened because all the believers recognized God's calling them to be witnesses in this ministry. Leaders, such as Peter and Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, were needed, but the people of the church accomplished the work of the church.

The early church saw itself not as an institution but a movement. Many believed Christ's return was imminent. The urgency of the message and the brevity of time necessitated no structure. However, as time passed by and it became clear Christ might not return until a date farther into the future, the church began to recognize need for some order and structure. What began perhaps as some level of quality control evolved across time into a pattern of creating a clergy class to handle sacred things on behalf of the rest of the church. This pattern grew so rigid that what began as calling people *within* the body of the laity to lead the laity changed to calling people *out of* the laity to handle holy matters for the laity.

During the Reformation, four vital truths resurfaced that had long been buried:

- (1) scripture alone,
- (2) grace alone,
- (3) faith alone, and
- (4) the priesthood of all believers.¹¹

The first three took root, but the last has struggled. Regrettably, not long after the Reformation, the preacher simply replaced the priest as the preacher-expositor role overtook the priestly role.

One might expect that the laity would be outraged. Sadly, the laity have often been as ready to relinquish control as the clergy have been eager to seize it. In a dark collaboration, ministry has too often been both ceded by the laity to the clergy and simultaneously seized by the clergy from the laity. This

system truncates ministry and keeps the church from fully being the body of Christ in the world.

What value is given to lay ministry in your church? Have you seen it change through the years? If so, how?

When is a time you recall when clergy really placed great trust in the laity?

Name some ministries in your church that are lay-led.

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints [] for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”*
(Ephesians 4:11-12)

A key biblical text concerning this subject is Ephesians 4:1-13. This passage needs priority attention because of the confusion attached to the “fatal comma.” Verses 11-12 read, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints [*] for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

At the point of the inserted asterisk, the King James Version and others inserted a comma. The comma resulted in the pastor/teacher having the function of :

- (1) equipping the saints,
- (2) doing the work of ministry, and
- (3) building up the body of Christ.

Conversely, removing the comma (the original text had no punctuation) clearly delineates the function of the pastor/teacher specifically to equip *the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ*. Doing the work of ministry is not the exclusive property of the clergy. It becomes expressly the high calling of the laity. Gordon Cosby succinctly states, “The primary task of the professional minister [is] training the nonprofessional ministers for their ministry.”¹²

First Corinthians 12 indicates that God has given to every believer gifts for building up the body of Christ. Two cardinal truths stand out in this passage.

- First, *every person* is gifted, not just the clergy. Quite to the contrary, the far vaster numbers of laity hold the greatest store of gifts in the body.
- Second, the gifts are not given for the individual to hoard or display for personal gain, but they are given *for the good of the whole body* of believers. Paul humorously illustrates that no part of the body can dispense with any other part (1 Cor. 12:21-22). Every part depends on every other. Every part needs every other. Every part strengthens every other. The Church will only be the body God has called it to be when laity are raised up for ministry and embrace the calling God has given them.

Do most people in your church think of ministry as done by clergy or by the laity? Why?

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 2

Power of the Covenant Ministry Team— Theology of Sacred Partnership

Day 1

On Belay

Mountain climbers inspire and baffle most of us. Why they would risk their lives in rugged terrain and bitter weather to reach the top of a rock perplexes us. At the same time, the very fact that they would tackle a project so daunting and challenging inspires us.

But one thing no sensible mountain climber would do is set out on the quest alone. In order for the summit to be reached, it requires a team effort. The team not only helps one another but also saves one another. Just ask those who have slipped and would have fallen to their death had they not been on belay.

Being connected to one another while mountain climbing is called being “on belay.” Each person has a belt with a clip on it known as a carabiner. At critical points, the climbers pass the rope through the carabiners so that each person is connected to another. While one attempts a critical passage, the other person holds firm to save the climber should that one fall. Then the one who has a secure hold helps rescue the one who is down. Staying connected is a matter of life and death. Only a fool would not stay “on belay.”

Staying connected to the body of Christ is no less a matter of life and death. The stakes are eternal. None of us can make it alone. The gifts are in the whole body of Christ, not any *individual*. Paul humorously talks about it in *1 Corinthians 12:21*, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’” The eye needs the hand, the head needs the feet, and so on. Every part needs every other part and cannot survive alone.

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your church members on commitment to the body of Christ? Why? How would you rate yourself? Why?

What could your church do to help members of your congregation stay “on belay?”

Covenant Ministry Team

- To start with, we are a **team**. This ministry (as every ministry in the church should be) is no Lone Ranger project. We enter it together. We bring the multiplicity of gifts that the Spirit has given us. We listen corporately to God’s voice, and each of us will catch nuances others miss. We teach each other. We learn from one another. We strengthen each other. We encourage one another. We are a team.
- In particular, we are a **ministry** team. Teams come together for all kinds of reasons from sports to business. We come together for ministry. We will continually remind one another that it is Jesus’ ministry. All of it is Jesus’ ministry from start to finish. We simply join him in his work as he calls us to extend his grace. No joy could be greater than partnering not only with one another but also with Jesus Christ himself in his ongoing work of redeeming our world.
- In addition, we are a **covenant** ministry team. In our legal and business world, we are accustomed to signing contracts. We sign them for our homes, our utilities, our cars, and everything else. These are binding agreements of a legal nature. These say, in essence, that if we keep our part of the agreement, the other parties will keep theirs.

A covenant is different; it is entering into an agreement not on the basis of law but on the basis of the heart. Marriage is a covenant. Hearts are knit

together, and God ratifies it. So it is with this ministry team covenant. We enter into it not as a legal contract but as a matter of the heart, and God ratifies it. To that end, it makes the commitment not less binding but more so. Yet it is not crippling because it is the voluntary bond of love.

* * * * *

Day 2

Initially, I subtitled this chapter “Theology of Sacred Accountability.” As I continued to pray and think over that, I believe God moved me to change it to “Theology of Sacred *Partnership*”. Accountability is one aspect of partnership, but partnership captures a truth far broader. While accountability may conjure images of a crabby teacher looking over one’s shoulder with the demerit book in hand, partnership calls forth images of collegiality and mutual support. The latter—not the former—is the picture we want to hold clearly in mind.

What images/pictures/ideas come to your mind as you think of partnership?

Power of the Team—Biblical/Theological Foundations

In order for any team to function in a healthy fashion, a healthy environment must be present. For the altar prayer ministry team to truly operate as a credible arm of the church’s prayer ministry, the members must understand their role, must make a commitment to be faithful to that calling, and must remain in accountable community with others on the team.

Key Biblical Texts

God never intended for people to live in isolation. From the dawn of creation, God asserted, “*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion to help him.*” (Gen. 2:18 NLT)

Although this passage deals specifically with marriage, its application in terms of living in relationship is clear. Life is a journey to be shared.

Old Testament mentors.—Scripture abounds with examples of those who mentored others along life’s journey.

- Moses developed _____ so that he was prepared to take leadership at a critical time in Israel’s history. (Deut 31:14)
- Elijah passed his mantle on to _____. (1 Kings 19:19)
- Eli mentored young _____, sadly neglecting to do the same for his own sons. (1 Sam. 2:11-12)
- Samuel anointed young _____ to take the place of Saul in guiding Israel. (1 Sam. 16:13)
- Jehoiada raised and taught _____ godly values. In fact, the biblical account states, “*All his life _____ did what was pleasing in the LORD’s sight because Jehoiada the priest instructed him*” (2 Kings 12:2 NLT).
- By contrast, the times of greatest chaos in Israel’s history were times when no leaders were being developed. Occasional leaders came and went but their influence lasted no longer than their lifetime (see Judges).

* * * * *

Jesus.—Here we learn from the great Master Teacher himself.

- Jesus called _____ to come be with him. Jesus called them to follow him so they could learn from him (Matt. 4:19).
- Before they went out to serve him, they took time to _____ with him (Matt. 16:24; 19:21; John 8:12). Their presence with Jesus enrolled them in the richest school of experience possible.
- Jesus never lost sight of team ministry. He sent out disciples _____ (Luke 10:1).
- He helped his disciples learn in the laboratory of experience. When he fed the five thousand, he empowered the disciples working together to organize the people (Matt. 14:19).
- He spent time with a core group of disciples— _____, _____, and _____—to empower them for ministry (Matt. 17:1-8).
- In fact, one can observe that the disciples’ greatest failures resulted from times when they lived in isolation (Mark 14:68-71).

- The lone separated disciple—_____—lacked faith when the others believed in the resurrection. (John 20:24-25)
- Most tragic of all, _____ went out into the night and took his life in the darkest hell of loneliness. (Matt. 27:5)

* * * * *

Paul.—Paul keenly appreciated the wisdom of team ministry.

- He learned it when _____ came to lay hands on him to receive his sight (Acts 9:17).
- He experienced it when _____ came alongside to give him a chance to be trusted by the church (Acts 9:27), to teach him (Acts 11:25-26), and ultimately to partner with him on the first missionary journey.
- The early church understood by divine guidance that ministry is best done in concert with others. After praying, they commissioned Paul and Barnabas to undertake their journey (Acts 13:2-3). Verse 4 adds that being sent out by the Church is tantamount to being sent out by the _____.
- Paul continued to try to pass this concept along by mentoring Mark (a partially aborted effort saved by the persistent and patient encourager, Barnabas), Timothy, and Titus.
- Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus continue to provide keen insight for those who are learning how to be Christian leaders.
- Paul reached out to many more, including _____ and _____ (Acts 18:2), Onesimus (Philemon), and Tychicus (Eph. 6:21)

* * * * *

Day 3

John Wesley on Team Ministry

John Wesley was not the only leader God used in his day. However, Wesley's genius and enduring impact emerged from his use of small groups. These societies, classes, and bands had the common thread of holding one another accountable to

mutually agreed upon commitments. Such accountability was far from restrictive. Instead, it linked people in partnership with one another to break the chains of sin and forge a new life of freedom in the Spirit.

David Lowes Watson speaks to this issue of commitment:

The fact of the matter is that Christians throughout the history of the church have found the means of grace to be altogether trustworthy. Compared with the unreliability and volatility of individual Christian commitment and experience, these seasoned habits are foolproof. And just as people willingly bind themselves to contracts which they wish to keep inviolate in the midst of their own inconsistencies, so Christians need to bind themselves willingly to those means of grace which empower their works of obedience, and thereby maintain their relationship with God in Christ.

One need only note how readily persons sign financial and real estate agreement, often committing decades of their lives to repayments, to make the obvious contrast with Christians who are unwilling to make even a minimal commitment to what are self-evidently the basics of their discipleship.¹³

Class meetings in the Wesleyan tradition held each other accountable for personal Christian discipleship, for availing themselves of the means of grace, for living in the world through service, for remaining connected to the Church, and for abiding in the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

Albert Outler makes this comment on Wesley's class meetings:

[Wesley was not] a theologians' theologian. His chief intellectual interest, and achievement, was in what one could call a folk theology: the Christian message in its fullness and integrity, in 'plain words for plain people.'¹⁵

Covenant groups

These covenant groups typically had written agreements. Failure to keep these agreements would result in the group's helping to correct the wayward persons. If the people persisted in waywardness, they were expelled from the group. Neither response was harsh or legalistic, because the covenant group's intent was always to speak the truth in love. The essential role of these accountability groups was *remedial*. In other words, they were to "remedy" the situation to help the other person.

This covenant accountability follows the same spirit of Jesus as when he spoke of dealing with one who had sinned. "*If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back*" (Matt. 18:15 NLT). Even the expulsion of a person from a group would show the seriousness of the situation, hopefully leading to repentance.

Works of mercy and piety

Practices enjoined for Wesley's class members fell into two categories—works of mercy and works of piety.¹⁶ Works of mercy included two inverse categories: doing good and avoiding sin. Works of piety included: worship, sacrament, prayer, scripture, fellowship, and fasting. Wesley thus kept from being exclusively inward or outward. The participants balanced personal faith and public practice. Practice grew out of faith and faith informed practice.

Works of Mercy

Doing good
Avoiding sin

Works of Piety

Worship
Sacrament
Prayer
Scripture
Fellowship
Fasting

In which of these do you find yourself strongest? Which is the greatest challenge for you? Why?

Day 4

Altar Prayer Ministry Team Covenant

While discerning the covenant for the altar prayer ministry team, three primary foci emerge: commitment to the Lord, commitment to the ministry, and commitment to the team. The commitments are to be clear without being legalistic. To that end, broad strokes are used, asking the ministry team members to be accountable to others in the group and to monitor their own hearts. If integrity is compromised in the prayer ministry leaders, the entire ministry could be compromised. Individual and team integrity are considered foundational to ministry integrity. Ministry integrity, in turn, reflects on the fundamental integrity of the Church and its Lord.

- ✓ **Commitment to the Lord**, without a doubt, is the most critical arena of all. It is vital that all ministry team members bear witness to faith in Christ. With that common ground, all are asked to commit to personal devotional disciplines, availing themselves of the means of grace. At a basic level, all are asked to remain consistently in worship within the body of Christ on a consistent basis. The corporate means of grace, such as Holy Communion and prayers, should be used whenever possible. The gifts are given to the Church and operate within the Church. To attempt to minister apart from the Church would be equivalent to an arm surviving apart from the body or a branch living apart from the vine.

Personal spiritual disciplines are understood to be means of grace rather than legalistic rules by which participants are bound. Personal disciplines include prayer, scripture reading and meditation, fasting, and “formative listening to the voice of God.”¹⁷ Not to grasp the means of grace would be as self-defeating as failing to eat when hungry or to sleep when tired. Grace only builds up. In the covenant context, the group recognizes that often it is in the times people feel least willing to be held accountable that they need it the most. The team helps one another to remain steadfast when emotions and feelings would otherwise set them adrift on their whims or ungodly desires.

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your commitment to the Lord right now? Has it grown weaker or stronger across the past year? If so, how?

Can you discern any reason(s) for this change?

Day 5

- ✓ **Commitment to the ministry** includes a willingness to share the spiritual gifts God had bestowed. The team members recognize that their ministry is simply an extension of Christ's ministry. Consequently, faithfully maintaining the connection to Christ is essential. The ministry cannot be accomplished by techniques, secret words, or manipulation; it must depend utterly on Jesus. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Part of the commitment to the ministry further includes a strong commitment to absolute confidentiality. When engaged in this kind of personal ministry, those in need grant the gift of trust. To abuse that would be for those in need to have cast pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6).

Fill out the simple Spiritual Gifts Inventory in the back of the text. Identify your primary spiritual gifts.

What spiritual gifts do you believe God has given you? How are you using them? How can you use them in altar prayer ministry?

- ✓ **Commitment to the team** is a commitment to live in the Spirit and the life of the body of Christ. Each person's fidelity builds up the others' spirits and validates the ministry. This means that each team member commits to a two-year initial participation, renewable annually thereafter. Partnership means committing to a bond that holds two ways. Not only will others hold a participant accountable to the covenant, but also that person will likewise bear a responsibility to hold others accountable.

Note here a vital distinction. Accountability fits beneath partnership. The focus on partnership means that the primary role of each participant is to build up, strengthen, and encourage the others. Accountability is only one aspect of

that process. The picture is not one of a faultfinder's standing over people to catch them doing wrong. Rather, the picture is of mountain climbers attached to other persons to catch them if they fall. The goal is not to criticize but to save them and lift them up.

Commitments to the team include confidentiality, ongoing learning, and a desire to keep growing both as individuals and as partners in the ministry. Further, ongoing team commitment is a commitment to pray for others on the altar prayer ministry team, to meet together at least once a month as a whole group, and with another small group periodically. This commitment expresses a desire to be encouragers, beginning intercessory prayer on the team's own doorstep.

What would it mean to you to be part of this team?

Intercessory Concerns

Prayerfully consider the Altar Prayer Ministry Covenant on page 34. At the end of this training, you will be asked to sign it as your commitment to the Lord, to the ministry, and to the team—if you sense God's call. If you do not sense God's call, you need feel no obligation to sign this and participate in this ministry. We are seeking those both equipped and called.

ALTAR PRAYER MINISTRY TEAM COVENANT

As a Christian disciple, I daily commit myself to respond in obedience to God's call, to daily center my whole life in Christ, and to daily open myself to the power of the Holy Spirit. Together with the other members of the Altar Prayer Ministry Team, I covenant to seek the heart and will of God through:

1. Commitment to the LORD.

I will daily practice the spiritual disciplines of prayer (both speaking to and listening to God), scripture reading, confession, generosity, and service. I will seek to grow in other spiritual disciplines as well, understanding that all are a means of God's grace and an invitation to grow in faith and service.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

2. Commitment to the MINISTRY.

Having taken the vows of membership at MBC, I will gladly share the spiritual gifts God has given through me, recognizing that God is extending the ministry of Christ. I will always maintain confidentiality.

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor 12:7)

3. Commitment to the TEAM.

I gladly make a two-year commitment to serve on the team. I will pursue constant learning, embrace mutual partnership, guard my personal integrity, pray for others on the team, and meet with a team monthly after training. I will make attendance a top priority.

"I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you." (Philemon 7)

Signed _____ Date _____

Pastor _____ Date _____

John Wesley's Covenant Service Prayer

The spirit of humble self-surrender and service is articulated profoundly in John Wesley's Covenant Service:

I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee; exalted for thee or brought low for thee; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

(The United Methodist Hymnal)¹⁸

This spirit of submission will permeate the classes with the spirit of grace apart from which the covenant would be dead legalism. These meetings provide the connective strength of the Methodist movement and the means by which members “watch over one another in love.”¹⁹

Conclusion

Paul's analogy of the Church as the body of Christ unfolds the concept of team ministry so powerfully. The human body functions properly only when every part functions according to its design, cooperating with every other part. Team ministry functions well, also, when the parts synchronize with one another. Cooperation, not competition, must be the watchword of the group.

Integrity provides the bedrock for the ministry; because if trust is violated, the relationships on which the ministry depends (both with God and with people) are in jeopardy. Confidentiality cannot be compromised. The participants are entrusted with things close to people's hearts. These things—and the people who share them—must be treated with all the dignity and respect accorded to them by their heavenly Father.

CHAPTER 3

Power of Intercessory Prayer— Theology of Sacred Encounter

Day 1

Introduction

Firmly rooted in scripture, four foundational assumptions drive this ministry:

1. First, prayer connects people intimately with God (Luke 6:12). Intercessory prayer has transformational power as it helps provide the connection to allow God's grace to flow toward the person in need.
2. Second, the altar is a crucial place where people can meet God in powerful, transforming ways (Gen. 22:1-18). The altar (rightly used) has always been a place of intimate communion with God in the scripture. When people meet God at the altar, their most profound needs are met. People's greatest need is God himself, not merely some *thing* he bestows.
3. Third, laity can exercise the ministry of intercession with as much power and authority as the clergy (1 Pet. 2:9-10). In fact, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers necessitates the gift of shared ministry among all God's people. Regrettably, that ministry has too often been either ceded by the laity to the clergy or seized by the clergy from the laity. The Church will engage and transform the world more fully as the laity reclaim ministry.
4. Fourth, incredible synergy multiplies power when team ministry happens (Mark 6:7). Standing against the tide of self-centered individualism, this ministry depends on mutual encouragement and mutual accountability. This is a partnership in the best sense, a ministry operating within the body for the good of the body of Christ and for the good of the kingdom of God in the world.

Knitting together the four central assumptions above, this study considers one primary idea. What people need more than anything is a vital, growing relationship with God. This relationship can begin, grow, or mature through a dynamic encounter with the living God in Jesus Christ. The altar is one biblical and primary place where people can meet God. Equipped intercessors, connected as a covenant team, empowered by the Holy Spirit can effectively help connect the seeker and God. This divine-human encounter can lead people to life transformation.

What have been the most significant God encounters in your life? When did they happen? How did they change you?

As you intercede for last week's concerns, write them here before the Lord to reinforce them .

Day 2

Power of Intercessory Prayer—Theology of Sacred Encounter

Prayer is one of the greatest privileges available to every person. That privilege can be extended by praying for others, helping to lead them into the presence of God.

An old saying states that there are no atheists in foxholes. Something instinctively cries out to God in times of crisis. Every group of people in every age in every place has prayed in some way. Intuitively, people know a spiritual universe exists beyond this world and prayer is the soul's reaching out to grasp that reality. Through the ages, people have wanted to know how they are to pray and whether their prayers make a difference. Furthermore, people have wanted to know if they can pray effectively for others in such a way that it makes a difference. We cannot find a better source that speaks to these issues than the Bible.

Sin's nature clamors for people to live isolated, self-reliant lives. Prayer teaches that life need not be lived in isolation but in communion with God and people. Prayer becomes an avenue for reconciliation with God and for connection to others.

Key Biblical Texts

Moses—Exodus 32:32. *“On the next day Moses said to the people, ‘You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.’ So Moses returned to the LORD and said, ‘Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written.’”*

If rebellion appropriately described the people of Israel, intercession described Moses. Repeatedly, the biblical account shows the people's turning from God followed by Moses' pleading to God on their behalf. In this passage, Moses had just returned from Mt. Sinai only to discover the people had made a golden calf, turning from God and turning to idolatry. God's anger burned white hot.

Even as judgment fell, Moses pled for mercy. He went to make atonement. He did not want God to start over with him to make a great nation; rather, he pled for God's mercy upon his people for God's own glory. In one of the most passionate intercessions ever recorded, Moses identified with the people by asking God to blot him out if that was what God did to the Israelites. Moses interceded with identification. In the true spirit of intercession, he was "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12).²⁰

Rees Howells commented on this issue:

Never before in a crisis, such as at the Red Sea, had Moses offered himself as a mediator, but now he stood between the wrath of God and the people. He had the offer to take the place of Abraham to be the founder of a new nation, but he refused. All personal ambition had gone long before. He was responsible for these people, and the man who has accepted a commission from God has authority over him.²¹ (qtd. in Ruscoe 107)

Rees Howells continues this theme:

Without the intercession of Moses, God would not have gone with the people any further, but as the intercessor, Moses brought God again into their midst. He had been a leader before: now he was an intercessor.²²

**What impression does Moses' intercession make on you?
What do you think was Moses' motivation?**

Daniel—Daniel 9:2-4, 17-19. “[I]n the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession....Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, and for your own sake, Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary. Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name!”

One of the most striking instances of intercession comes from Daniel’s prayer of passionate and sacrificial crying out to God for mercy.

Daniel had laid his life down for God at the lion’s den years before. The issues of *why* Daniel lived his life and *for whom* he lived his life had long been settled. Now more than ever, he lived only for the glory of God. He prayed for the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy with fasting and supplication. Self had gone. He identified himself with the people as he prayed, interceding for forgiveness. The ground for Daniel’s appeal was nothing less than a cry for the glory and honor of God among the nations. Thus, Daniel found the clearest foundation for intercession—the character, purpose, and glory of God.

*Daniel based his appeal for the deliverance of his people
on God’s mercy
rather than on their merit.*

Daniel based his appeal for the deliverance of his people not on their merit but on God’s mercy. Daniel confessed that his people had sinned against God and rejected him. While their character crumbled, Daniel cried out for God to deal with his

people on the basis of God's perfect character. He asked for Israel's restoration so that the wicked would see God's glory in God's mercy and so God's own character would be vindicated. Israel and all the nations would see and know God's righteousness, faithfulness, and grace. They would recognize that God always kept his covenant.

Read Daniel 9. Note the reason for his prayer, the basis for his appeal, and his identification with his people. Why does he ask God to hear him?

Day 3

Paul—Romans 9:1-3. *"I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh."*

Paul likewise interceded with self-sacrifice as he wept over the apostasy of his own people, Israel. He so identified with his people that he was willing to be written out of God's Book of Life if only they might be written in! Only one man before him had prayed quite like that—Moses (Exod. 32:32). Indeed, Paul laid aside all for Christ, counting all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, the Lord (Phil. 3:7-8). Throughout scripture, it is self-evident that true intercession is costly, indeed. The deepest intercession comes not from ones looking on from without but from ones identifying from within.

*The deepest intercession comes
not from ones looking on from without,
but from ones who identifying from within.*

One might have expected Paul to pray for the Israelites as though he were set aside from them by his faith, but he did not. Instead, he identified with his people. He cried out before God for mercy on his people, putting himself squarely in their midst. He had not forgotten his own blindness to the truth nor had he forgotten the astonishing mercy of God's saving him. Thus Paul stood before God on behalf of his people, willing even to be cut off from God if only his people might be saved (Rom. 9:3). This was the kind of love that laid down its life for its friends (John 15:13).

Read Paul's intercession for his people in Romans 9:1-5; 10:1-4; 10:14-11:6; 11:19-24. What makes his appeal so passionate?

How can your intercession change based on the statement in the box above?

Jesus—Mark 1:35. *"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed."* (NRSV)

Jesus had finished a very busy—and successful—day of ministry. The stage seemed to be set for pursuing more of the same strategy. How astonished the disciples were to discover that Jesus had other plans altogether. The disciples did not understand until later that Jesus' decisions were birthed in the womb of prayer. Only Jesus could ever say, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise" (John 5:19). Jesus could no sooner forsake praying than he could forsake breathing.

*The disciples did not just ask Jesus to teach them how to pray
but to teach them to pray—
to actually do it.*

As his disciples spent time with him, they understood clearly that not merely what Jesus did but also who he was grew out of the time he spent in prayer. No wonder that scripture records but one request from the disciples—“Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1 NRSV). In the human penchant for quick “how-to’s,” it is easy to miss the disciples’ request. They did not just ask him to teach them *how* to pray but to teach them *to* pray—to actually *do* it.²³

James Thompson comments on Jesus’ lifestyle of prayer:

When Jesus Christ lived on earth He did really pray. That is a fairly obvious thing to say, but it does require to be said because the chances are that we do not take sufficiently seriously the fact that Christ *did* [original emphasis] pray when he was on earth.... He taught us how to pray not in word only but also in act. Christ showed us how to pray by praying. It was when He was “praying in a certain place” that one of the Twelve said, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). It was not His teaching on prayer that evoked the request. The request leaped to the lips when one day the disciples, with hushed and awed hearts, actually watched the Son of God at prayer. Looking at Jesus Christ praying they suddenly realized what prayer was. If that was prayer they had not yet started to pray.²⁴

List three times you can recall when Jesus prayed. If prayer had such priority in Jesus’ life, does it have that role in yours? in your church’s?

Day 4

John 17:1-26. *“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one”* (v. 20).

No greater prayer of intercession (outside of Calvary) ever ascended to the throne of God than Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17. Jesus appealed to his Father on behalf of his disciples through all the ages. After Jesus prayed for himself (vv. 1-5), then he interceded for his disciples (vv. 6-19) and the whole Church (vv. 20-26). He asked the Father for their security, sanctity, and unity. Jesus unmistakably revealed his passion for the Father, the Church, and the world. Jesus still intercedes for us so fervently since we live in a world that is deceived, dangerous, defiled, and divided.²⁵

Jesus asked the Father for his disciples’ security, sanctity, and unity. Jesus still intercedes for us so fervently because we live in a world that is deceived, dangerous, defiled, and divided.

Warren Wiersbe

Jesus’ passion for the Father was visible in Jesus’ desire to bring him glory. Jesus’ desire was for people to know the Father and the Son whom he had sent (vv. 1-5). Jesus’ passion for the Church manifested itself in his high priestly prayer as he asked the Father to keep his people. In an unholy and hostile world, Jesus asked the Father to sanctify and save the Church by his word (vv.9-19). Jesus’ passion for the world revealed his heart. The unity Jesus asks the Father to foster in the Church was that the world might believe (v. 21). This is the same heart that Jesus had when he said, *“God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16 KJV).

Read John 17 carefully. Record here as many requests as you can that Jesus makes in behalf of his disciples then—and now. (Use space on the next page, as well.)

How does it make you feel to realize Jesus is at this moment praying these same prayers over you? your loved ones?

Luke 23:34 *“Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’”*

This scripture give evidence of the sweetest, costliest intercession of all. This intercession was more than words; it was life. The Incarnation itself was pure intercession. The life and ministry of Jesus was intercession. Now, the climactic surrender of his life for the sins of the world became the supreme act of intercession. *“But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed”* (Isa. 53:5).

Jesus did not run from the cross. He came into the world precisely to bear it to Calvary. *“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name”* (John 12:27-28). Nor did Jesus revile his murderers. Instead, he interceded for them with the words, “Father, forgive them.” Then he committed himself into the hands of God as he completed his life of intercession by dying on the cross.

*Now, the climactic surrender of Jesus' life
for the sins of the world
became the supreme act of intercession.*

This passage reveals with clarity that intercession demands personal, costly mediation. The intercession was so deep that Jesus actually bore the sins of the world so that the world might be set free from its penalty. *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 2:5 RSV). This intercession did not keep sinners at a distance. Instead, he *“was numbered with the transgressors,”* (Isa. 53:12) identifying with them as he took their punishment. Such intercession grew out of his passionate love for his Father and for his prodigal world.

The deepest act of intercession was made not just with words but also with life. What feelings come to you when you realize Jesus made this intercession for you as he died for your sins on the cross?

Is there a person or situation for which Jesus is asking you to make costly, self-giving intercession? If so, write that name here.

Hebrews 7:23-26. *“Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.”*

If any exclamatory note could arise to compare with Christ’s intercession at Calvary, it would be his continuing intercession for the Church before his Father. *“He always lives to make intercession for them”* (v. 25). What peerless power and joy belong to those who realize that Christ’s intercession for people still continues in the presence of his Father. Hope should grip people when they realize their Judge is also their Advocate. *“Even now Jesus continues to help any people who are tempted by strengthening them and pleading for them (Heb. 2:8; 7:25).”*²⁶

Dutch Sheets gives a different perspective:

Christ's intercession, in keeping with its literal meaning ["to go or pass between; to act between parties with a view to reconcile those who differ"—Webster], was not a *prayer* [original emphasis] that He prayed but a *work* [original emphasis] of mediation that he did.... He is now functioning as our representative, guaranteeing that we have access to the Father and to our benefits of redemption.... So what is He doing as He makes intercession for us? He is mediating or going between, not to clear us of charges against us as He did to redeem us from sin, but to present us to the Father as righteous and one of His own.²⁷

Paul described the divine transaction succinctly, "*For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and people. He is the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim. 2:5 NLT). Precisely this intercession opened free and gracious access to the Father. Jesus made the perfect way because he was the perfect Sacrifice. The perfect High Priest was himself the perfect Lamb to bring people back to God (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:10, 19-22; 1 Pet. 3:18).

Read Hebrews 7:11-28 and note why the author says Jesus is the perfect high priest and intercessor.

Day 5

Intercessory Prayer

The literature on prayer can only be described as vast. Amazon.com lists over eight thousand titles on the subject. The primary focus of this study is intercessory prayer. In no way does this study purport to be exhaustive or exclusive. Note that in the context of this ministry training, altar prayer and intercessory prayer are used interchangeably in most respects. Altar prayer, however, has the added dimension of personal, on-site, immediate intercession in most cases, whether this takes place at a site known as an altar or not.

Intercessory prayer, of course, can be offered anywhere at any time. Likewise, intercessory prayer can be lifted up with the person for whom prayer is offered either present or absent. For our purposes, the focus is on intercessory prayer offered on behalf of the person with the person present.

Intercessory prayer connects us intimately with God. Intercessory prayer has transformational power as it helps provide the connection to allow God's grace to flow toward the person in need. Yet many believers and churches neglect this critical ministry.

William Evans describes the current crisis in vivid terms that challenge the Church to act:

It would be easier to conceive of a city without electricity, transportation, telephone service, water and police protection, than it would to conceive of the Church without prayer. Yet the unhappy truth is that many churches have “supper rooms” for eating and drinking, but no “upper rooms” for prayer and waiting on God.²⁸

Jesus' was angry with the moneychangers because they had usurped the purpose of the Temple. They cheated people and exchanged spiritual realities for cold cash. The critical problem, however, was that their activities usurped the central activity of the Temple—prayer. Prayer connected people to God, but moneychangers kept them from God. No wonder Jesus was outraged.

Only once did Jesus say his house was to be a place for a particular thing. He proclaimed it must be a house of prayer for all nations (Mark 11:17; Matt. 21:13; Luke 19:46). He did not make this proclamation quietly with sweet words. He spoke with passionate zeal and holy fury. He made sure his word echoed with overturned tables and scattered animals. His message rang out as clearly as the clatter of coins' crashing onto the floor. He drove his point home emphatically with a homemade whip as the exclamation point. Here was no meek and mild Jesus. Here was Jesus full of fire for the purpose of his Father's house. If it were not a house of prayer, it was nothing at all.

Would Jesus be any less outraged with the Church today? Christians have made their churches houses of preaching, teaching, singing, eating, dancing, and even exercising, but they have relegated prayer to leftovers of time. Many churches have shuffled the responsibility of prayer to certain people they vaguely think of as super spiritual. Often people dismiss as hopelessly unrealistic that prayer should occupy the central place in the time and priority of every believer. Tragically, what Jesus fought for, the Church has often surrendered.

What things today keep us so busy with other priorities that our churches become less and less houses of prayer?

What would Jesus say about the priorities of your church?

What would Jesus say about the priorities of your life?

R. A. Torrey sounds an unwavering warning:

The devil is perfectly willing that the Church should multiply its organization and its deftly contrived machinery for the conquest of the world for Christ, if it will only give up praying... Satan laughs softly, as he looks at the Church today, and says under his breath: "You can have your Sunday schools, your YMCAs ... your grand choirs, and your fine organs, and your brilliant preachers ... as long as you do not bring into them the power of Almighty God, sought and obtained by earnest, persistent, believing, mighty prayer."²⁹

The truth is that no change occurs unless the leaders and people get dissatisfied with the status quo. It might be time once more for Jesus to come and cleanse his Temple. Rather than moneychangers, Jesus would likely throw out our projects, our busy activity, and our studying which substitute for time with him. Jesus might find in the present Church as much resistance now as he encountered then.

Ray Fulenwider offers a blueprint for change that begins with a fundamental dissatisfaction with the status quo. From there this change moves into action, vision, and communication. The final, irreplaceable component is prayer. Using a simple acrostic, he states that change comes with these ingredients:

C ause for unhappiness

H ard work

A new vision

N ew plans with a good chance for success

G ood communication

E veryone prays.³⁰

Rather than consider prayer as the last item on the list, we must consider prayer to be the foundational item undergirding this entire process. Fulenwider asserts that prayer is the only way the Church can embrace God's plan. God releases power to every member when the Church becomes prayer driven. Prayer must always be primary, never secondary.

Name some areas in your life where God is stirring you to make a change.

Name some things in your church in which God is stirring you to consider making a change. Please pray about it, and then go talk with your pastor or other church leader in a helpful, supportive, encouraging way. Offer to be a catalyst in making this change.

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 4

**Power of the Altar—
Theology of Sacred Place****Day 1****Introduction**

In creation, God met in the cool of the evening in wonderful fellowship with Adam and Eve. Sin broke that relationship. Everything changed. The pair was evicted from Eden. Every outward sign indicated no hope. However, one thing changed it all—God followed them beyond the Garden. Adam and Eve may have run from God, but God pursued them.

As the biblical story unfolded, God kept revealing a way for the relationship to be restored. It could not happen by ignoring the transgression. Sin always brought penalties; the consequences were death. God stepped in, however, and provided a way of atonement. It happened at the altar. A substitute took the penalty. Thus the parties who have been estranged—God and people—reconnected through God’s mercy. The penalty was satisfied, and atonement secured at great cost. This debt was paid, and freedom was secured at the altar.

Alex Reed tells of trying to learn the Otetela word for altar when he went to the Belgian Congo as a missionary. He showed them a simple kneeling rail he had created for prayer. “We have no such word,” they said. He persisted further in explaining the Old Testament concept of sacrifice. “Oh,” they said, “we do have a word for that. It is ediakelu. It means ‘the killing place.’” Reed recounts how he explained to the people that the kneeling altar precisely reflected that definition. It is a place where believers die to self only to become alive to God.

Dr. Joseph Davis³¹

Key Biblical Texts

Throughout the scriptures, the altar consistently plays a central role in the work of God among his people.

Note in the blanks who builds an altar.

_____—**Genesis 8:20; 9:1.** *“Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.... God blessed Noah and his sons.”*

Although one could reasonably contend that Cain and Abel presented their sacrifices at some sort of altar (Gen. 4:1-5), the first explicit mention of an altar occurs in the Noah narrative. Following the flood, Noah was so grateful for God’s deliverance that he took some of the animals that God had preserved on the ark and sacrificed them to God on an altar.

Good reason exists to believe that very early on the need for altars was revealed to man as basic in approaching God. Long before the Mosaic instructions relating to worship, the altar had become an established meeting place between God and humanity.³² God, for example, indeed proved himself faithful. Beyond simply telling God of his gratitude, however, Noah’s sacrifice demonstrated it. In response, God gave Noah and his heirs a blessing and a promise.

Hebrews 13:15 says, **“Through [Jesus], then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.”** In your own words, write a short **“sacrifice of praise”** that you would like to give to God out of gratitude.

Genesis 22:1-19. *“Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘Father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ He said, ‘The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ Abraham said, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’ So the two of them walked on together. When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.’ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’” (vv. 7-14)*

One can trace Abraham’s entire spiritual journey through his altars.³³ When God promised to give his heirs the land, Abram built an altar to acknowledge God’s grace and Abram’s gratitude (Gen. 12:7). In the next verse (Gen. 12:8), as Abram moved to a new place, the altar became a place to invoke God’s presence and God’s blessing. After Abraham failed to reconnect with God in Egypt, he revisited God at this altar (Gen. 13:4, 18). The relationship was restored.

In all the Old Testament, perhaps no meeting with God at an altar occurred more poignantly or intimately than when Abraham, now an old man, faced God on Mt. Moriah with his son, Isaac, and all his dreams at stake (Gen. 22:1-19). Now it was an altar of absolute surrender to God and utter confidence in God. He obeyed God in the face of everything that cried out for him to turn away. Abraham laid Isaac—the son of promise—on the altar of sacrifice. When Abraham built the altar and prepared to sacrifice Isaac, the central focus was not that the angel stopped him but that God met him. God was waiting for Abraham at the altar. To forsake the altar (despite all of its costs) would have meant to forsake meeting the Lord.

What would be the most difficult thing for you to sacrifice to God? Spouse? Child? Finances? Success? Security? Other? By an act of trust and faith, write a prayer of surrender and offer it to God today.

Day 2

Exodus 20:24. *“You need make for me only an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your offerings of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.”*

When the Lord showed his hand strong in the defeat of Amalek (Exod. 17:15-16), Moses built an altar to signify the might of the Lord to defend his people. This was an altar of trust. Yet God had a greater altar to reveal to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Sacrifices of burnt offerings and well-being were presented there. God met them, brought blessing, and caused his glorious name to be remembered there. In the climactic moment of Exodus, when the tabernacle was complete and the altar was ready, God descended in glory. When God’s presence settled at the altar, the exodus was seen not simply as coming out *from* the midst of a foreign people, but as coming *into* a relationship with the God who had chosen Israel as his own:

“[Moses] set up the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen at the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” (Ex. 40:33)

In Exodus (29:37) and throughout Leviticus (i.e. 4:3; 8:11, 15), the altar became a place of atonement for sinful people and consecration for his servants. Those who were far off were brought near in the infinite mercy of God.

I Corinthians 3:16 states, “Don’t you know that you are the temple of God and that his Holy Spirit dwells in you?” Would you pray right now and ask the Lord to fill you anew with his Spirit. Pray for his purity, presence, and power.

I Kings 18:1-40. *“Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, ‘Israel shall be your name’; with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD.... ‘Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.’ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench.” (1 Kings 18:31, 37-38)*

One of the most dramatic encounters in the biblical narrative occurs at Mt. Carmel. The altar had been often seen as a place of meeting in atonement, in gratitude, in submission, in refuge, in obedience, in praise, in worship, in repentance, in consecration, and in spiritual renewal. Here God met his people in blazing power.

Elijah single-handedly challenged the multitude of Baal prophets to a duel of sorts. Let each call on the name of their deity to see who would answer by fire. Each would build an altar and prepare a sacrifice to lay on it. Then they would pray and see who sent fire from heaven. The Baal prophets cut themselves, shouted, and pled, but their powerless gods did not hear. Elijah taunted them, mocking that perhaps their god was asleep or on a bathroom break. Of course, such a god was no God at all.

When the day wore on and the prophets of Baal got no response, Elijah prepared his altar. He prepared it lavishly, confidently, with in-your-face assurance that the God of Israel would answer. He not only prepared the sacrifice but also poured bucket after bucket of water on it until the trench around the altar

was even filled. Was this Elijah simply showing off? Far from it. It was Elijah's way of demonstrating that when the answer came, it would demonstrate the almighty power of the Lord, beside whom there was no other.

In response to the unwavering faith of his servant, Elijah, God showed himself strong on behalf of his name. The fire of God consumed not simply the offering but also the water and the stones of the altar, as well. God exposed the powerless sham of those who followed false gods. Those who served false gods used altars, as well, but they proved to be only form without substance. The power lay not in the altar itself but in the God who met his people at that altar.

Is there an area in your life where you need God to show himself strong? Write a simple prayer and ask him right now to do it for the honor of his name.

Day 3

Matthew 23:18-19—Jesus. *“And you say, ‘Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound by the oath.’ How blind you are! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?”* (NRSV)

Jesus reiterated the point that outward form without inward substance makes the altar moot. To quibble on technicalities missed the entire point. The gift on the altar was sacred because the altar was sacred. The unspoken extrapolation was that the altar's sanctity stood unquestioned. This could only be because God met his people there.

For that reason, one must never approach the altar casually. Priests consecrated themselves, yet so must all God's people. They approached God with sacrifices, but Jesus added that outward form alone could no longer suffice. The one who conformed to tradition without surrendering the heart only made mockery of the altar. The one who truly comes seeking God

comes in prayer. That is why Jesus drove out the moneychangers. They substituted ritual when people sought the reality of prayer. Furthermore, Jesus asserted that the one who approaches the altar must come in a right heart, not only with God, but also with mankind (Matt. 5:21-24).

Jesus taught, *“So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift”* (Mt. 5:23-24).

Is there someone to whom you need to be reconciled today? Put down that person’s initials, stop right now, and ask God to help you take a first step. (Remember that you are responsible for your actions, not the other person’s response.)

Hebrews 2:19; 9:24, 26—Spiritual Altar. *“Therefore [Jesus] had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.... For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.... But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.”*

Hebrews in a remarkable way ties the old covenant ritual to the new covenant reality. Although the word altar is not mentioned, its presence is clear as Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for sinful humanity. The altar in this case was not an earthly one but one in the heavens. His atonement was the perfect and complete one of which earthly sacrifice could only be a dim shadow. The best lamb was imperfect at best; the Lamb of God was spotless and without blemish. The best atonement by a priest must be made repeatedly; the sacrifice of Jesus was complete forever (Heb. 9:25-26). The finest priest could only offer an impure sacrifice because he was impure (Heb. 5:1-7); Jesus was the perfect High Priest who enters the very courts of heaven on behalf of a sinful humanity (Heb. 2:17; 9:24).

Read Hebrews 9 and list the ways in which Jesus has perfectly fulfilled what the old sacrificial system could only demonstrate in part.

Revelation 8:3—Heaven's Altar. *"Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne."*

In heaven, an altar stands before the throne of God. Under it are the souls of the martyrs (Rev. 6:9). On it are poured out the prayers of the saints (Rev. 8:3). On it burns the fire of God's judgment (Rev. 8:5; 14:18; 15:7). The heavenly throne is a place where the divine plan is being fashioned. Yet in the new heavens and new earth, not only will no altar exist but neither will there be a temple. The glorious reason is that God himself will be in heaven so people will have no need for a place to meet him. *"I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb"* (Rev. 21:22). The people of God will live in his presence.

In summary, the altar is a point of departure from sin, a point of contact with God, a place of revelation from God, a place of discovering truth, a place to die to self, a place to find refuge, a place of total surrender, a place of meeting the Advocate, and above all a place of worship and relationship.

Day 4

A Post-biblical history of the altar

The altar of the early Church in no way resembled the kneeling rails of today. The altar was viewed symbolically in terms of Christ's mediating the way for sinful humanity into God's presence.

Yet, while the altar was little present in early Church architecture, from the birth of the Church the call to commitment stood out dramatically. For instance, to the crowd's query upon hearing Peter's first sermon, "What shall we do?" Peter unhesitatingly replied, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:37-38). This response was what today might be termed an altar call.

In the early church, no literal altar was present where the people could meet God. Without a doubt, however, multitudes of people encountered God's profoundly life-transforming power as they responded in repentance and self-surrender. The altar had been a foreshadowing of God's place of mediation, reconciliation and restoration. When Jesus died on the cross and the curtain into the Holy of Holies was torn (Matt. 27:51), once and for all, the way of the altar became accessible to all humanity.

Reformation and the great awakenings.

With the institutionalization of the Church under Roman Catholicism, this invitational preaching diminished. Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and the other Reformation leaders restored the evangelistic call.

Invitational preaching reemerged strongly in America's Great Awakenings. In many respects, the public invitation is a uniquely American phenomenon.³⁴ The American culture's emphasis on individualism lent itself to the call for personal faith. Individual responsibility before God called for individual response to God. Jonathan Edward, for example, became a forerunner of the invitation. His preaching called forth not simply an intellectual but also an emotional response.

In England, John Wesley broke the bonds of tradition by reaching common people through outdoor preaching, ending all of his sermons with an appeal to come to Christ. Wesley may

have originated the mourner's bench or anxious seat, which was a pew reserved for those anxious for salvation or personal counsel. Those under conviction or in need could come forward for prayer.³⁵

Back in the United States, Dwight L. Moody and Charles G. Finney employed the personal call for public decisions, often inviting seekers to an inquiry room. Frequently, people were asked to stand to their feet or respond in a public way that confirmed their decision.

Not everyone supported this new movement in the church. Some decried the innovation as heretical. In 1843, John W. Nevin attacked the innovation in a missive called The Anxious Bench. Interestingly, he did not deny its popularity or seeming success; rather, he insisted it lacked true spiritual power and gave a false security to the conscience. In a pejorative broadside, he called any type of public invitation "quackery."³⁶

The kneeling altar.

The kneeling altar hit its full stride in the camp meeting movement. Bishop Francis Asbury and his circuit-riding preachers used the kneeling altar with great effectiveness.³⁷ The usually crude and simple mourner's bench came to be called an altar by the faithful, but mockers called it the "pen."³⁸ Likely, the term altar used for the kneeling rail originated when seekers were invited to come pray at the rail where communion was served, hence the "altar":

The altar provided a powerful place for people to meet God and receive immediate help. This movement provided a shift not so much in theology as methodology. This methodology developed out of the growing American spirit of individualism. The methodological shift toward personal invitational calls resonated well with the cultural shift toward individualism. Streett identifies three essential values of the kneeling altar:

It gave those needing spiritual help an opportunity to indicate their need by going forward. The altar was also a symbol that one must be willing to take a public stand for Christ. Finally, it was tangible proof of the seeker's willingness to take decisive action in order to be saved.³⁹

Undoubtedly in the last two hundred years, the kneeling altar has proved to be a method richly blessed by God. While its evangelistic use within certain denominations (such as Methodism) is fading, the fact is that God has used the altar tremendously. In the nineteenth century, one author wrote about the altar:

When we consider the fact that more souls in modern days have been saved at the altar than by any other method, we believe in it with our whole heart, and shall use this method on every fitting opportunity, until we can find some other method by which more souls can be led into the light. We shall say to those who criticize this method, what J. S. Inskip said to those who said, "We do not believe in your methods of doing it." He replied, "I do not like your methods of not doing it."⁴⁰

Day 5

Cautions and emerging trends.

Recalling that the kneeling altar was an innovation in the Church at one time, the Church would do well to remember that God is still a God of new things. The Church ought not canonize the kneeling altar, for God may raise up a new methodology. Neither should the Church lose the true heart of the kneeling altar, which is the invitation to make a present response and meet the Lord in prayer.

Three powerful new emphases have emerged in recent years, innovations of their own.

1. First, lay involvement has powerfully influenced altar prayer. No longer is this sacred ministry seen as the exclusive property of the clergy but the ministry of the whole Church. The Church has begun to take seriously Peter's word about the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9-10).
2. Second, altar prayer ministry has been amplified to include needs of all kinds. No longer is the altar exclusively for calling the lost to salvation, but it is also a place for believers to meet God. At the altar, believers can find mercy, guidance, healing, strength, and purity.

3. Third, the invitation to the altar can be given at some point other than the conclusion of the service. For example, it can be given during the pastoral prayer time or communion so that people can bring their concerns before God.

Think about and write down some responses to the three items listed above. In particular, can you think in your church setting where altar invitations could be effectively used? What kinds of invitations could be given? Think outside the box!

The Church ought not canonize the kneeling altar, for God may raise up a new methodology. Neither should the Church lose the kneeling altar's true heart, which is the invitation to make a present response and meet the Lord in prayer.

As with any method, abuses inevitably accompany it. Dangers include: 1) relying on emotionalism, 2) counting success by numbering bodies at the altar, 3) making going to the altar a work that saves, or 4) insisting that going to the altar is an essential precursor to true conversion.

If we are consciously or unconsciously leaving the impression that a well beaten path to and from the altar is the type and ideal of Christian experience and the final analysis of obedience to God we are fooling the public, displeasing the divine, [and] misleading souls.⁴¹

Many churches have been cultivating a new openness to the altar, reclaiming it as a place to meet God no matter what their concerns or needs. The so-called “open altar” helps promote “a new attitude toward the altar as a place of love and victory instead of an unfriendly place where people publicly admitted their failures.”⁴² The altar becomes a place for healing of hearts and healing of relationships. Forgiveness and restoration can be proclaimed joyfully.

The Church finds itself at a new cultural crossroads. If individualism was the cry of emerging America, today’s culture increasingly extols personal rights and privacy, fosters widespread suspicion of emotional appeals, and roundly resists anyone asserting they have the truth. In this climate, we would do well to see evangelism as shifting from being seen as a crisis to being seen as a process.⁴³ Above all, today’s culture clamors not to make anyone uncomfortable. So in this new dynamic, the Church must again walk the tightrope between connecting to the culture and confronting the culture, avoiding the trap of accommodating itself to the culture.

Conclusion

Christians must embrace the fundamental fact that every believer (and the Church as a whole) has a right to meet God. This meeting can take place at the altar, where one dies to the old self that God may bring a new self to life.

*“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!”*

(2 Cor. 5:17)

People can meet God at the altar whether they come for salvation, for sanctification, for healing, or for intercession. Whatever the means or the place, meeting God must remain central, not necessarily the methodology. At the same time, the church should be adequately self-introspective to see whether the

abandonment of a means reflects the abandonment of a tool or if it reflects a genuine abandonment of theological principles. If it signals the latter, the Church desperately needs to find its way back to an “altar” to meet the living God.

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 5

Power of Lay Ministry— Theology of Sacred Calling

Day 1

Picture # 1

In colonial Williamsburg stands a stately and beautiful church and many others have modeled their own sanctuaries after it. The most striking feature of the church is its remarkable pulpit. Entering by a circular staircase, the pastor stands high above the congregation—remote, exalted, and separated from the people. One gets the impression that not only is the pastor high enough to speak for God, he or she is high enough actually to *be* with God! This image stands in contrast to the laity who remain among the profane confines of the world while the pastor ascends the sacred stairway to heaven!

Picture # 2

In post-Reformation English culture, the pastor was even given a new title—the “parson.” One requires little imagination to see this as an adaptation of the word “person.” The parson was *the person* in that society and he was not like everyone else. He was set apart. Others were secular and ordinary, but he was holy and extraordinary.

* * * * *

Both of these pictures set a striking illustration of the persistent and still-common misunderstanding of the role of the laity. This problem is also integrally woven into the misunderstanding of the role of the clergy and the relationship between clergy and laity. Rather than being viewed in a complementary manner, clergy and laity have most often been pictured in either adversarial roles or in contrasting roles consisting of the activity of the clergy and passivity of the laity.

Whatever its origins, this attitude has clearly created an improper focus on the clergy, side-tracked the enormous power and potential of the laity, and crippled the work of the kingdom of God in the world. A look at both the biblical teaching and the biblical model quickly clarifies the total inaccuracy and inadequacy of such improper thinking. Not only is this attitude

biblically and theologically upside down, the very nature of reality militates against it. (One recalls the humorous assertion that football is twenty-two people desperately in need of rest being watched by 22,000 people desperately in need of exercise!) The Church would be foolish to assume that God's work could be done by a handful of clergy while the masses of laity sit idly, whether by their volition or clergy rejection.

In what ways does the Church tend to encourage a spectator mentality among laity? In what ways does the Church encourage laity in active ministry?

Read Ephesians 4:1-13. What is said about the body of believers? What is the function of the pastor?

Read Romans 12:1-8. What gifts are noted in the body of believers? What is said about unity and diversity?

Read Exodus 17:8-13. Read the story about Moses, Aaron, Hur, and Joshua. Who is really doing "ministry" that day? Who is helping that to happen? What does this say about releasing people for *their* ministry?

Exodus 18:13-27. What problem was Moses facing? What counsel does Jethro, Moses' father-in-law give to him? Why? Who suffers when ministry is not shared? Who benefits when it is?

Reclamation of the idea that ministry belongs to the laity may be the greatest movement of God in this time. While lay ministry is clearly taught in scripture, this concept was buried in Church practice for centuries. The Reformation made an effort to restore the ministry to the laity but fell short in actual practice. "Lip service" to the idea fell short of actual implementation. Today's burgeoning move of lay ministry is pivotal in both the life of the Church and the move of God's kingdom. In fact, the idea is so critical that one author has entitled his work on lay ministry The New Reformation (Ogden). Truly embracing lay ministry could be that transformational in the Church.⁴⁴

Day 2

Laity (*laos*) and clergy (*kleros*) in the New Testament.

1. In biblical parlance, *laos* refers to all the people of God (1 Pet. 2:9-10; Acts 15:14). *Laos* is never used in the New Testament to distinguish a group from the clergy (*kleros*). All have been called, and all are one body (Eph. 4:1, 4). *Laos* always refers to the *whole* people of God powerfully set aside for his purpose.
2. In Greek language of that day, a related word was often found in common usage—*laikos*. *Laikos* referred to a "non-professional" person in a given area. This person was distinguished from the ones who were really were skilled in a particular area. *Laikos*, which means "belonging to the common people," was never used in the New Testament.

3. Likewise, a third word used for laity in common Greek was *idiotes*. Though this word did not carry the connotation of our English word *idiot*, it did refer to a layperson, not an expert. Again, this word was never used in the New Testament.⁴⁵

Paul Stevens contends “the church in the New Testament has no ‘laypersons’ in the usual sense of the word, and is full of ‘clergy’ in the true sense of that word.”⁴⁶ The real scandal of clericalism is witnessed against the biblical backdrop of equality and unity (Eph. 2:12, 13-16; 3:28; Rom. 8:14-17, Gal. 4:4-7). What God has joined together, man has put asunder.

*The church in the New Testament
has no ‘laypersons’
in the usual sense of the word,
and is full of ‘clergy’
in the true sense of that word.*

Paul Stevens

What do you think Paul Stevens means by his statement above? What examples can you think of from the Bible that support his claim? Especially think of the account of the early church in Acts.

In the Bible, laity and clergy are never distinguished; they are the same people. The clergy do not exist outside the laity but within the laity. Gordon Fee’s figure below beautifully illustrates this relationship and graphically portrays the true relationship of laity and clergy.

Relationship between laity and clergy⁴⁷

Scripture knows no separation between clergy and laity, but recognizes a distinction between the two. As both Martin Luther and John Calvin agreed, the distinction is in terms of office or function, not in terms of essential nature as a believer.⁴⁸ In God's design, while the two are distinguishable, they are interdependent.

Scan through 1 Peter chapters 2 and 5 and note what Peter says about the priesthood of all believers. Especially note 1 Peter 2:9-10.

Describe what your church would look like if all the laity saw themselves as deployed in mission to the world each week? How would this vision impact your community?

Day 3

Jesus as our Model

One cannot ignore the fact that Jesus did not seek out religious leaders as his disciples. Instead, he called those whom the Church would term laity, who came from the normal sectors of life. Jesus deliberately chose “laity” over “clergy” for at least two reasons. First, they had fewer presuppositions that had to be unlearned. Second, having come from the fabric of the world, they understood the fabric of the world and were willing to return to it when Jesus sent them. As surely as Jesus incarnated the gospel by coming to be a human, his disciples incarnated the gospel by going among the people they knew intimately from the common walks of life.

Jesus took *laity* and gave them ministry because *he (Jesus)* modeled it. One ought not miss the point that *Jesus was a layman himself* with a career as a carpenter. He never intended the ministry to have disjuncture with common life. Jesus intended the ministry be lived out in common life. That is the model and message of the Incarnation. Ministry was not for a segmented few, but was the property of all believers.

The disciples grasped one further key concept, that their ministry was not for Jesus, but that *Jesus was doing his ministry through them*.⁴⁹ They were doing nothing on their own (John 15:5). *They were simply extending Jesus’ ministry* by letting his hands work through theirs and his words speak through theirs.⁵⁰ That is why Peter could deflect praise when the lame man was healed by in effect saying, “Why do you look at us? Look at Jesus!” (see Acts 3:12-13).

Perhaps the disciples emulated Jesus’ model so well because they saw it lived before them. On the other hand, it may be believers have few truly biblical models to follow in the present day, blinding us so we miss God’s plan while following false substitutes. The superstar clergy and sedentary laity model is certainly one that has paralyzed the Church. The time has come to reclaim Jesus’ model. The goal is not to draw everyone into vocational ministry. The goal is to return everyone to his or her own life with a vision to extend Jesus’ ministry there.

* * * * *

What is your reaction to the fact that God sent Jesus as a layperson, not a clergyperson?

Why the Church failed to embrace Jesus' model

If the first 200 years are marked by a unified vision of the laity, we would do well to identify the reasons it changed its course.

The larger an entity becomes, the more structure is necessitated. Structure, however, need not restrict function, but should enhance it. Nonetheless, growing structure cannot help but impact an organism or an organization. A child has incredible flexibility, but stronger bones are required as the child grows to maturity. Flexibility is lost, but strength is gained. In an analogous way, a growing and expanding early Church (especially as it got farther distant from those who had actually known Jesus on earth) began to develop structures for organization and "quality control." Unfortunately, this structuring turned what God made as an organism (body of Christ) into more of an organization.

One might expect that things took a radical turn in the Reformation, but such was not the case. The Reformation held out four great truths:

1. Scripture alone,
2. grace alone,
3. faith alone, and
4. the priesthood of all believers.⁵¹

The first three took root, but the last has struggled.

* * * * *

*Reinstatement of the ministry
of the whole people of God
“will be realized only
if the ‘nonclergy’ are willing to move up,
if the ‘clergy’ are willing to move over, and
if all of God’s people are willing to move out.”*

Tom Gillespie⁵²

To truly recapture the biblical idea of ministry with laity and clergy in proper place would transform the Church. Elton Trueblood powerfully states:

If in the average church we should suddenly take seriously the notion that every lay member, man or woman, is really a minister of Christ, we would have something like a revolution in a very short time.... Suddenly the number of ministers in the average church would jump *from one to five hundred* [emphasis mine]. This is the way to employ valuable but largely wasted human resources.⁵³

Gibbs and Morton, in their classic volume, God’s Frozen People, say recapturing the ministry of the laity would be for the Church equivalent to discovering a lost continent or finding a new element.⁵⁴ However, reinstatement of the ministry of the whole people of God “will be realized only if the ‘nonclergy’ are willing to move up, if the ‘clergy’ are willing to move over, and if all of God’s people are willing to move out.”⁵⁵

Why do you think it was easier for the Reformation to accept scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, only to struggle with accepting the priesthood of all believers?

Day 4

Reclamation of the Biblical Model

1. Reclaiming the biblical model begins by giving the ministry back to Jesus. How presumptuous of believers to think of service as “their” ministry or, worse still, as the clergy’s ministry. The truth is that if it is authentic ministry, it is always Jesus’ ministry. Believers simply extend that ministry as his hands to touch the world. Dr. Steve Seamands clarifies that Christian ministry is not believers asking Christ to join them in *their* ministry. As they offer him to others, believers join with Jesus in *his* ongoing ministry as he offers himself to the world through them.
2. Next, reclaiming the biblical model happens when believers give the ministry back to the Church. Jesus said, “As the Father sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). Then he breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples. If the Church can learn anything from Pentecost, it learns that the Holy Spirit was poured out on *all* believers without distinction. The impartation of the Holy Spirit anticipates nothing more than that Jesus’ saying to the *whole* Church, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21).
3. Reclaiming the biblical model creates a culture of mutual servanthood. Mutual distrust must be counteracted by the pattern of Jesus whose life and ministry modeled service (Mark 10:45). Jesus did not just *do* ministry; Jesus *was* a servant. The clergy must recapture the truth that they are called to serve the laity, not the other way around. In turn, laity are not the clergy’s helpless assistants. *The laity must recapture the truth that they are called to serve the world.*

Ben Patterson uses the image of mountain climbers being on belay. Those climbing the dangerous terrain have placed trust in those who have them on belay. Those gripping the safety line hold the lives of the others in their hands. These roles may be exchanged repeatedly as the heights are scaled.⁵⁶ What a powerful image for clergy and laity to seize. Believers keep each other on belay. In truth, their very lives depend on serving one another and trusting one another implicitly.

4. Reclaiming the biblical model includes restoring a biblical understanding of the gifts of the Spirit. At least five keys must be grasped in the context of the spiritual gifts. These keys include:
- (1) The Spirit gives a multiplicity of gifts *to the whole body*;
 - (2) Laity, no less than clergy, are recipients of the gifts;
 - (3) These gifts are to be used to implement God's work in the world;
 - (4) The gifts are not to be used in isolation but in *cooperation*; and,
 - (5) The gifts are not for self-glorification but *for the common good*.

In our increasingly isolated culture, we must proclaim that there is no such thing as a "Lone Ranger" Christian. We all need each other. The gifts in totality only exist within the body as a whole. Paul's humorous analogy is right on target. "*The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'*" (1 Cor 12:21). To embrace the foolish idea that a saved Christian does not need anyone else reflects arrogant self-centeredness, which is the very essence of sin and antithesis of the spirit of Christ.

Do you feel like your spiritual gifts are being best used in the Church? Is there a step you need to take to start exercising those gifts fully?

5. Reclaiming the biblical model means the Church recognizes laity are called to ministry in every sector of life. When Satan could not get the Church to turn from ministry completely, his deception took the step of minimizing the Church's effectiveness by truncating its participation and scope. The first step was to suggest that ministry ought to be left to the real professionals who could do it right. One wouldn't expect laypersons to perform surgery, so why should one expect laypersons to do ministry? If some persistent laypersons insisted ministry belonged to them, as well, the second line of deceit was to limit the Church's scope of ministry. Thus, if the Church agreed laity could do ministry, it could only be on Sunday or at church. However, it certainly did not belong in the rest of the week.

The truth is precisely to the contrary. Believers are called and gifted to minister seven days a week in six sectors of service: personal, family, congregational, community, occupational, and civic/political.⁵⁷ The five sectors beyond the church are neither second class nor are they an afterthought. Rather, ministry in the church is precisely for the development of gifts to be used beyond the church. God's calling is not to retreat from the world but to equip believers to go into the world transforming it by his grace. "Whatever your task, put yourself into it, as done for the Lord and not your masters" (Col 3:23 The Message).

* * * * *

Six sectors of service for believers

1. *Personal*
2. *Family*
3. *Conregational*
4. *Community*
5. *Occupational*
6. *Civic/political*

Three views can prevail in this matter of laity engaging in ministry in every area of life.

- First, laity leave the church, make a raid into the enemy territory of the world, and then retreat to the sanctuary of the church.
- Second, life exists in sectors, with the religious aspect as one sector. Laity simply move into the appropriate sector at the appropriate time. Each sector has little to do with the other, and the faith sector hardly informs the other sectors at all.
- Third, the Church is at the heart of the world. Each sector of life is intimately interrelated, and the Church enters every sector to flavor it as salt seasons food.⁵⁸ This view reflects the heart of God.

Which of these three views of the laity seems to predominate in your church? In your life?

**Is there a change that needs to take place? If so, what is it?
What is a first step you can take?**

Day 5

6. Reclaiming the biblical model happens as believers reclaim the Church's call to kingdom ministry and mission. The Church is truly a "missional Church." It does not exist to *do* ministry, but it exists *by* ministry as a fire exists by burning. Mission and ministry are neither optional nor peripheral, but they are the heartbeat of the Church.

What priority does missions have in your church? In your budget? In your prayers? In your service? Do you think Jesus would be pleased? If a change is needed, what is it? What is a first step toward being truly a "missional church"?

7. Reclaiming the biblical model happens when the Church restructures delegation of clergy time, energy, and commitment. So much clergy time is spent in caring for the sick, lonely, and needy. The point is not that the clergy should be unconcerned about these things; the point is precisely the opposite. The clergy should be so concerned about these needs that they marshal the resources of *all* God's people to meet those specific needs. Those who are comfortable in the old ruts will not quickly accept this change. However, believers must discern their motivation, whether it is to please people or to please God. The vision is to share ministry. What clergy cannot do alone, laity and clergy can do together.

This change in mind-set can be illustrated by the difference between offering care for the injured at the bottom of a cliff or building a fence at the top so people do not fall off. This means that clergy and laity alike need to understand that clergy must allocate far more time to spend with the healthy, who in turn will go to the sick and lonely.⁵⁹

What ministries that have traditionally been left to clergy can be effectively done by the laity?

8. Reclaiming the biblical model means the Church learns to reclaim ministry out of weakness, not strength. So often fear becomes the dominant mover instead of grace. Clergy fear laity will be inadequate for the task. Laity want significant meaning and ministry but fear the same thing. The whole Church must honestly ask with Paul, “*Who is sufficient for these things?*” (2 Cor. 2:16). The honest answer is no one—neither clergy nor laity. For both, their sufficiency is in Christ alone. When believers understand this concept, a new trust can infill them. *Since it is Christ’s ministry and the Spirit’s giftedness, God will enable the ministry.*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

[B]ut [Jesus] said to me [Paul], “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

(2 Cor. 12:9 NRSV)

Read John 15:1-8 and meditate on what it means to be a branch that dwells in the vine. What truths does God speak to you?

What is God saying to you when Jesus states, “Apart from me you can do nothing?”

* * * * *

The Conductor and the Orchestra

The conductor steps to the podium and taps his baton. A hush falls across the audience. The conductor motions and beautiful music swells majestically and washes across the hall. No one assumes the conductor created the music; everyone knows the orchestra did. At the same time, everyone is equally aware of the fact that the orchestra could not create the music apart from the conductor.

In the same way, the clergy operate with the laity as the conductor operates within the orchestra. The conductor does not play the music, nor does the violinist ignore the conductor. The quality of the symphony depends on their mutual interdependence.⁶⁰ Clergy are called not to power but to service of the laity. Conflict between conductor and symphony creates only “dis-chord.” Cooperation creates majesty.

Today's Church, if it is to be what God created it to be, must grasp God's plan for the clergy to operate as servants within the laity to equip, inspire and empower the laity for ministry. The world awaits the symphony of praise that will proclaim the wonders of Jesus Christ and the salvation he has bought by his own blood at the cross. What is at stake are the future of the church—the Bride of Christ—and the eternal souls of God's children across the world are at stake.

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 6

**Personal Prayer Life of the Intercessor—
Learning to Know God in Prayer****Day 1**

Meditate on this passage today, emphasizing each word to gain deeper understanding (ultra-slow scripture reading).

“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”

(John 16:24)

Write down truths God shows you.

Day 2

While the focus of this intercessory prayer ministry is the public altar, the critical work of altar prayer ministry begins with the private altar. Until people know God, God cannot effectively use them. People cannot give what they do not have. Furthermore, this personal, intimate relationship with God must be nurtured to remain strong and vibrant.

People cannot give what they do not have.

At the outset, people may rightly ask why we should even pray. Two fundamental reasons can be set forth, one personal and the other providential.

1. On a personal level, people pray because they have a need, and they want God to help them. On a basic level, many prayers are “SOS” petitions to God for help during difficult circumstances. In fact, many people never get much beyond these kinds of prayers. God to them is a celestial vending machine where they insert their prayers to get an answer they want.

Unfortunately, this kind of prayer is merely transactional. The tragedy is that those who stop here never get to the relational. While God is glad—even eager—to answer our prayer, he wants far more. He wants an intimate relationship. Prayer is not so much about getting things *from* God as it is *getting God, himself*.

This seeking God for himself and not his gifts is a deeper level of prayer to which fewer go. This is prayer for God to gush forth a river of living water into their lives, the Church, or the world, or some particular area of need. When that living water flows, they don’t want to be found standing far off on dry ground. They want to jump into the river of God, not just God’s gifts.

2. On a providential level, in prayer people encounter the mystery of God’s self-limiting interaction with the world. How astonishing that the omnipotent God has so bound himself that in some things he cannot work until his people cry out to him. John Wesley went so far as to say, “God does nothing save in answer to prayer.”⁶¹ These believers pray in obedience because God calls them to pray. They pray because they realize in so doing they are partnering with God in the salvation of the world.

Consider this parallel dynamic that is at work. People realize that children cannot grasp certain truths until they are capable of understanding them. A child must understand addition and subtraction before going on to algebra. The spiritual truth is that people are often not yet prepared to receive what God wants to give them. Not until people ask do they finally grasp what God wants to give. Therefore, God has chosen not to barge into people’s lives but to wait for their intercession.

Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you know him more. Spend some time in prayer praising God for who he is. One way to praise God is by lifting up names used for him in the scriptures. (For example, “I praise you that you are the Good Shepherd,” etc.) Write these names below as you exalt his Name!

Day 3

People pray for many reasons. What ones can you list?

What has been your personal journey of understanding prayer?

List some of the things for which you typically pray. (These are alright, because God cares about our smallest need.)

List some of the other things for which God wants believers to pray. Think of any biblical ideas or passages to spur your thinking.

Day 4

Watchman Nee offers several key insights on watching and praying. These insights include:

- (1) Prayer is a service to God and must be placed in a preeminent position;
- (2) Satan will turn people from prayer at all cost; so they must guard time for prayer;
- (3) Believers must seek to remain alert during prayer so they are enabled to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, the beginning and end of their faith (Heb. 12:2); and,
- (4) Prayer must be focused so that they do not offer scattered, vacuous prayers.

Watchman Nee describes such powerless prayer:

During prayer, we must in addition guard against all that is not real prayer. We should know that Satan will not only prevent us from having time and power to pray, he will also cause us to waste the prayer time by our uttering many scattered, unrelated, unimportant, empty words as well as numerous vain requests. Our prayer time is so fully occupied with these things that our prayer is equal to zero. (119)

Focused prayer will answer the question Jesus asked in Mark 10:51, “What do you want me to do for you?”

- (5) Believers must confess sin, then stand strong against Satan's accusations. They must truly receive the forgiveness and mercy of Christ.

"The confession of our sins is a key to effective intercession. In intercession we seek to be channels through which our love and concern and God's love and power can flow into the lives of others."

Maxie Dunnam

This prayer channel is kept clear through confession.

- (6) Believers need to keep prayer from being vague. "Put on the whole armor of God," counsels Paul. "Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication" (see Eph. 6:10-20).
- (7) Finally, believers should watch after prayer to see how God is at work, either answering the prayers through changes in circumstances or changes he is making in them.⁶²

Which of Watchman Nee's seven points on prayer make the deepest call on your life and you find easier?

Which one challenges you most? Is God saying something to you through this challenge?

Day 5

Nothing in the world is easier—or harder—than prayer.

- On the one hand, any child can pray. Why? It is because children know they are utterly dependent. Children are not guarding egos or trying to impress anyone. Children simply come in love and with simple, clear requests. When we come as children, prayer is easy.
- On the other hand, the deeper believers go in prayer, the more they recognize how utterly difficult it is. Prayer is difficult for them because they have forgotten how to be childlike. Believers want to assert their self-sufficiency and guard their egos. Prayer calls them to lay these down. Prayer is a call to die to self. Prayer is a journey to the cross. In prayer, believers admit they cannot and only God can.

Maxie Dunnam clarifies this:

Prayer is a death-process. It is dying to our lower self and coming alive to God. We put self-will, self-control, and self-centeredness to death that Christ may work and reign.... In prayer we cease leaning on the staff of self-will and put all our confidence in God.⁶³ (98-99)

In prayer we cease leaning on the staff of self-will and put all our confidence in God.

Maxie Dunnam

D. L. Moody picks up this theme:

In view of the difficulty of bringing our hearts to this complete submission to the Divine will, we may well adopt Fenelon's prayer: "O God, take my heart, for I cannot give it; and when Thou hast it, keep it, for I cannot keep it for Thee; and save me in spite of myself."⁶⁴

Before believers can ever be with people before God, they must be alone with God.⁶⁵ Nothing can take the place of the prayer closet. Nothing can take the place of time in the presence of God to know him intimately. Out of this love relationship alone can flow the depth of ministry that is true intercession.

*Before believers can ever be with people before God,
they must be alone with God.*

Andrew Murray

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 7

**Embracing the Ministry of Intercession—
Learning to Partner with God in Prayer****Day 1**

Meditate on this passage today, emphasizing each word to gain deeper understanding (ultra-slow scripture reading).

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

(Matt. 6:12-15)

Write down what God shows you.

Day 2

David Seamands says that in counseling, counselors are only temporary assistants to the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ This idea could be equally said of those who engage in intercessory prayer with people at the altar. What people need is to meet God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Intercessors do not heal people or help them as though the power were their own. Instead, they become temporary assistants to the Holy Spirit. The ministry of Jesus saves, helps, and restores. In other words, intercessors do not do the ministry as though it were *their* ministry; they simply become partners with Jesus in extending *his* ministry.⁶⁷

*[Altar prayer ministers] are only
temporary assistants to the Holy Spirit.*
David Seamands (adapted)

John Wesley once commented, “God does nothing save in answer to prayer.”⁶⁸ This theme appears repeatedly in scripture.

- Rain stopped and rain started when _____ prayed (Jas. 5:17-18).
- _____ became pregnant when she prayed (1 Sam. 1:9-18).
- _____ fled when people had prayed (Mark 9:29; Acts 16:18).
- _____ sounds a critical appeal that God is seeking desperately for intercessors:

“And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezek. 22:30).

The Church should grieve that God still finds so few intercessors thousands of years after Ezekiel and even millennia after the world-changing ministry of Jesus Christ. God seeks intercessors to partner with him in his ministry.

Day 3

Two marvelous images can guide intercessors here.

1. S. D. Gordon compares the prayers of the intercessor to a **switchboard**. The power is not in the switchboard but in the supply. The switchboard, however, with a small toggle can span a connection that makes the power accessible to those who need it. The intercessor is the one at the switchboard.⁶⁹
2. Andrew Murray offers the picture of intercessors as a **pipeline**. The intercessors do not actually give the Living Water, but they are conduits that enable the Living Water to flow to thirsty souls. As pipelines, they do not create the water but they channel the flow to reach those in need.⁷⁰

Which of these two images—switchboard or pipeline—conveys the greatest vision and hope to you? Why?

Make a list of the truths that emerge from the pictures of the switchboard and pipeline.

Switchboard

Pipeline

*The fact is that God chooses to work through—
not independent of—people.*

Day 4

Read the following quotes. If God has chosen to work through people, he wants to work through you. Be quiet before God and say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening,” and wait for God’s word to you.

Dutch Sheets helps sharpen the theme of how God uses intercessors:

“The only logical answer to the question of why Elijah needed to pray is simply that *God has chosen to work through people* [emphasis mine]. Even when it is the Lord himself initiating something, earnestly desiring to do it, He still needs us to ask.”⁷¹

Andrew Murray concurs:

“God’s giving is inseparably connected with our asking.... Only by intercession can that power be brought down from heaven that will enable the Church to conquer the world.”⁷²

Write down what God’s word is to you today.

Day 5

Doris Ruscoe gleans seven key principles of intercession⁷³ from Rees Howells, a giant of intercession.

1. Absolutely central is the principle that all intercession is based on the victory of Jesus Christ won at the cross and confirmed at the empty tomb. Intercessors do not attempt to do a work; they simply appropriate victory from Christ's finished work.
2. A constant warfare rages in the spiritual realms. Intercessors engage the forces of darkness in prayer not in their own strength alone. For this reason, intercessors must put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-13).
3. Nothing is automatic in this conflict. In prayer, intercessors must engage the forces of darkness if a victory is to be won in such circumstances. The intercessor identifies with those in need and engages the battle on their behalf.
4. At times intercessors may find themselves engaged in very real combat with the forces of darkness. The intercessor must then cry out for God's Holy Spirit and put on the armor of light (Rom. 13:12).
5. The intercessor recognizes this responsibility cannot be dismissed once God has called. Intercession may be undertaken at great cost, but the intercession must be carried out to the end. God is counting on it, as are those in need.
6. Intercession can apply in the daily work God gives to his servants. Taking up their work in an attitude of prayer on behalf of God can itself be an intercession impacting all those touched by it.
7. Intercession is not only the path of the cross in cost for the intercessor but also the way of fellowship with Christ. The true intercessor knows the passion, hope, and joy of Paul, who exclaimed from prison, "*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead*" (Phil. 3:10-11).

Absolutely central is the principle that all intercession is based on the victory of Jesus Christ won at the cross and confirmed at the empty tomb. Intercessors do not attempt to do a work; they simply appropriate victory from Christ's finished work.

The timid might question where intercessors find boldness to plead with God in confidence. Intercessors know their confidence lies not in their own power, righteousness, or wisdom, but in the appropriated victory of Jesus Christ.

There is a godly confidence that we rightly claim when we go to pray for others. Not the arrogance of one who sets himself up as Chief Adviser to the Most High, but the confidence of one who knows he does not go alone into the courts of heaven, but enters with the covering authority of the Son and the interpretive wisdom of the Spirit.⁷⁴

Believers come in intercession not simply *to* Christ but *with* Christ. Intercessors know that they do not come to persuade an unwilling God but to meet a God more eager to pour out blessings than they are to ask.⁷⁵

Intercessors know their confidence lies not in their own power, righteousness, or wisdom. The intercessors' confidence is in the appropriated victory of Jesus Christ.

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 8

Understanding Spiritual Warfare— Learning to Battle in Prayer

Day 1

One cannot read the Bible with integrity without coming to a clear knowledge that people are engaged in spiritual warfare. Even as people live their lives in the earthly dimension, a battle is engaged in the heavenly dimension. Jesus established a clear connection between what happens in the earthly and heavenly realms (Matt. 18:18-19). Believers have been given authority on earth to engage the forces of darkness with weapons of light and gain the victory.

Therefore, Paul sounds this warning:

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” (Eph. 6:11-13 KJV)

Dutch Sheets humorously asserts that many believers take the statement, *“We wrestle not against flesh and blood,”* and abbreviate the passage to simply say, *“We wrestle not!”*⁷⁶

People need look no farther than Jesus’ ministry to find him confirming the truth that we live in a world engaged in a pitched battle against the Enemy of our souls:

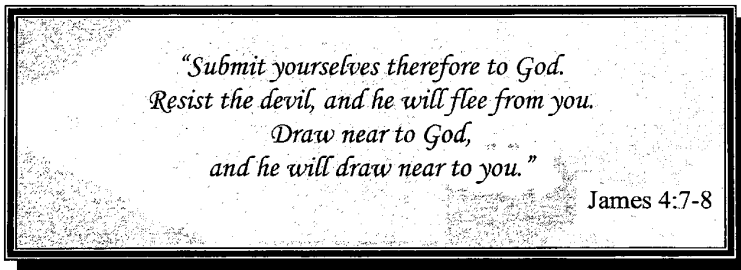
*“The Son of God was revealed for this purpose,
to destroy the works of the devil.”*

1 John 3:8

While James 4:7-8 counsels believers, “*Resist* the devil and he will flee from you,” many read it as though it says, “*Ignore* the devil and he will flee from you.”

How familiar is the concept of spiritual warfare to you? List any ideas from scripture of other learning that applies.

Day 2



Meditate on James 4:7-8, reading it ultra-slowly. Hear each word. What truths emerge? What is God saying to you?

Day 3

One important correction needs to be asserted in the matter of spiritual warfare. Some get so consumed with demonic forces that they are prone to see the devil behind every bush. Some prayers get so focused on casting out the devil that Jesus gets little mention. James 4:8 picks up this corrective by giving the counterbalance to resisting the devil—“*Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.*” Left with the lone injunction to resist the devil, people might despair, for they are unequal to the battle on their own. However, when they draw near to God, they discover power that makes them more than conquerors. Verses 8-11 unveil the power for victory through humility and surrender:

“Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters.” (Jas. 4:8-11)

Intercessors understand that repentance, turning from sin, and humbling themselves before God are primary to the ministry of intercession.

In addition, these verses from James teach intercessors that warfare prayer engages the spiritual realms in two directions.

- Downward prayer is directed at Satan and taking authority over him. “What is praying downward? It is standing upon the heavenly position Christ has given us. It is using authority to resist all the works of Satan by commanding that whatever God has commanded must be done.”⁷⁷
- Conversely, upward prayer is directed toward God, taking his promise as good as money in the bank and applying it to the need at hand. When we say, “Amen,” it does not so much mean “let it be so” as “*thus shall it be* [emphasis mine].”⁷⁸

What fresh ideas emerge from “downward” and “upward” praying?

Day 4

In warfare prayer, believers must learn to use their position in Christ. They never actually battle and defeat the devil—he *is already* defeated. God gave Adam authority over the earth, but Adam gave up that authority to Satan when he sinned. God sent a perfect Man to win back that authority. Jesus did so at the cross and at the empty tomb. Intercessors now have the responsibility to apply the victory already won to the battle with the devil.

Satan is defeated but has not yet surrendered. In fact, his goal is to wrest back control of the world from Christ. Since Satan cannot do that (though he is trying), his next tactic is to attack believers and the Church in order to strike at the heart of God. The Church must learn to stand by faith in God's power and claim the victory already won, applying it in each case, asserting the incredible power of the cross.⁷⁹

Only when believers sigh and give up in the battle do they cede back to Satan territory over which he has no legal right. Intercessors have the blood-bought right to evict Satan and his minions from the hearts of the faithful. The contract that Satan had, signed by Adam in his sin, is no longer valid. The debt has been paid in full. Another contract signed by Jesus with his blood supercedes and nullifies the former contract. The children of Adam have a right to be restored as sons and daughters. Satan's rights have been revoked, and he has no right to be present in their lives. Intercessors should not allow Satan to trespass where God has forbidden.⁸⁰

*In warfare prayer,
believers must learn to use their position in Christ.
They never actually battle and defeat the devil.
He is already defeated.*

Meditate on 1 Kings 18 as spiritual warfare. What can you learn?

Day 5

Another key biblical passage on spiritual warfare cries out from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians:

“Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Believers must ever guard against the illusion that their spiritual weapons are something granted them apart from the presence of God. Quite to the contrary, warfare prayer arises out of the intimacy of a loving relationship with God.⁸¹ Intimacy with God will not spare people from this battle; it will take them into the battle precisely because that is where Jesus is. In fact, it may appear to subject the believer to greater danger still.

How, therefore, are believers to understand this intensity of battle? Believers need neither deny the heat of the battle nor its great cost. However, believers should grasp the deep truth that those nearest to Jesus in the battle are the least subject to defeat.⁸² The believers' authority over the powers of darkness in intercessory prayer is born by placing themselves under the authority of Almighty God (Dan. 6:22).

What are the spiritual weapons available to believers? (See Eph. 6:10-20)

What kind of attacks can believers expect from Satan?

Ed Silviso, in That None Should Perish, gives a visual illustration of both the warfare in the heavenlies and our positional authority in the heavenlies.⁸³ He addresses the victory that is our right as blood-bought saints and the present state of Satan's broken power. He also presents what power the Church has and what warnings it must heed. (See explanation on p. 102.)

(Silvoso cont.)

(Silvoso diagrams explained)

Diagram 1

Silvoso uses terminology that may be unfamiliar to many. The *heavenly places* are the spiritual realms where warfare takes place between God and satanic forces (*Prince of the Power of the Air, Principalities and Powers*). *Transgressions and sins* lock us in spiritual death, which he terms the *Cosmic Grave*. Diagram 1 illustrates the state of affairs after sin entered the world. Sin locked us in death while Satan and his demonic forces exerted power on the spiritual battlefield in the heavenly places.

Diagram 2

God immediately begins a counterattack by bringing blessings, not judgment, to sinful humanity. His blessings begin to destroy Satan's power. Silvoso calls this God's "air war," similar to how an air force might prepare the way for ground forces to enter the battlefield through establishing air superiority.

Diagram 3

God makes his powerful strike by sending Jesus, who decisively defeats Satan at the cross. Jesus is exalted as the head and the demonic forces are put under his feet. At the same time, Jesus' victory has broken open the gates of hell and death.

Diagram 4

Head and feet are in place. Now God fills in the body of Christ, namely the Church, as believers come together.

Diagram 5

When the body of Christ is properly in place, two things are true. First, the satanic forces are under the Church's feet since the Church is Christ's body. Second, "the gates of hell cannot prevail against us." This is the victorious Church.

Diagram 6

In this scenario, there are two constants. First, Christ as victorious head is constant. He is conqueror and nothing can change that. Second, all demonic forces are under his feet. The variable is the body of Christ, the Church.

Diagram 7

When the body of Christ allows sin, disunity, and hostility to enter it, the body is infected and gives Satan opportunity to attack and disrupt. Therefore, the Church must always obey the head and never "give the devil an opportunity."

In intercessory prayer, when we sense a strong sense of opposition from the Enemy of our souls, here are some practical responses:

1. By way of preparation, keep your heart seeking after God. The sons of Sceva found that the name of Jesus is not magic (Acts 19:14-16). The power is in the relationship.
2. Stand in authority as you pray. Satan is the one who must kneel before the Father's power; we don't kneel before the evil one.
3. In faith, take hold of the authority that is ours in Christ. It is ours not by our perfection but by our position as Christ's sons and daughters.
4. Claim the victory over Satan won at the cross. Plead the blood of Jesus over the situation.
5. Get others to join you in prayer. There is strength in agreed prayer (Matt. 18:20).
6. Take the person aside in private if there is commotion or need for extended prayer.
7. Look to Jesus and let him pour out faith that conquers fear. "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:8).

*Believers should grasp the deep truth
that those nearest to Jesus in the battle
are the least subject to defeat.*

J. M. Winger

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 9

**Developing the Church as a
House of Prayer—
Learning to Grow in Prayer**

Day 1

One day Jimmy Buskirk passed by a group of ladies who prayed constantly.

"Ladies, if you'd put some legs on your prayers, you wouldn't have to pray so much," he said.

They responded, "If you spent more time in prayer, you wouldn't run your legs off so much!"⁸⁴

* * * * *

One can almost hear Mary and Martha's voices in that conversation. The Martha voice exclaims, "Do more." The Mary voice responds, "Pray more." In the face of these competing voices, people might wonder which should be in the Church. Very simply, the Church needs both Mary and Martha. At the same time, we need them in that order. First comes the call to pray, and then the call to do. In a church so prone to ask God to bless what people do, God is looking for a church that will first pray and then do what God blesses.⁸⁵

If believers are looking for a reason to make the Church a house of prayer, none greater can be found than Jesus' proclamation:

"My house shall be called a house of prayer!" (Matt. 21:13)

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42

List the strengths of Mary. Growth areas?

List the strengths of Martha. Growth areas?

Would you identify yourself more with Mary or Martha? Why?

Why is it so easy for the church to choose doing over praying?

Day 2

Prayer is that incredible medium in which people meet the living God in intimate communion. Anything that hinders this communion with God hinders the most fundamental relationship in the universe. Any hindrance must be ruthlessly rooted out. This is why Jesus made a whip and drove out the moneychangers. Preaching is good. Singing is wonderful. Food is fine. Teaching is essential. However, underneath all these, like the foundation beneath the church building, is prayer. If prayer is missing, all that remains is a house built on sand (Matt. 7:26).

If Jesus were to visit your church, what might he find that has a higher priority than prayer? What might Jesus “drive out” of our churches to make room for prayer?

What is one step you can take to help prayer get back in its priority place?

Day 3

Three Kinds of Churches

An important distinction must be understood at this point. One might identify three types of churches.

- The first type of church thinks prayer is good, but does not give it priority. Prayer that is lifted up takes place individually or by chance.
- The second type of church gives prayer a position as one of the key ministries of the church. Prayer has equal standing with other ministries of the church.
- The third type of church sees prayer as foundational to *every* ministry of the church. They could no more see proceeding in any area apart from prayer than they could imagine flying in a plane without wings.

Therefore, note that altar prayer ministry (intercessory prayer) will find its greatest effectiveness when set properly within the context of a wider prayer ministry in the third type of Church. “Praying together is a key element for building up the community and testing the spirits. The quality of communal prayer becomes an indicator of the group’s ability to grow as the body of Christ.”⁸⁶

Note that altar prayer ministry (intercessory prayer) will find its greatest effectiveness when set properly within the context of a wider prayer ministry in the Church.

Write a prayer for your church.

Day 4

Believers must never miss ONE central point. More than anything people need a vital, growing relationship with God. This relationship can begin, grow, or mature through a dynamic encounter with the living God in Jesus Christ. The altar is one biblical and primary place where this encounter can take place. Equipped intercessors empowered by the Holy Spirit can effectively help connect the seeker and God. This divine-human encounter can thus lead people to life transformation.

Prayer is partnership with God. Intercessory prayer is joining hands with Christ in his great ministry of intercession. Jack Hayford writes, "Prayer is essentially a partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God toward the realization of His redemptive purposes on earth."⁸⁷ In intercession, believers bring people to Jesus and allow him to do the healing ministry needed.

The intercessors' models here are the four friends in Mark 2 who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus. Their bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus and then persevering by tearing through the roof was itself an intercession. These friends' one overriding motivation was to bring this paralyzed man to Jesus. They believed Jesus could heal the man. Believing that Jesus could heal this paralyzed man, these four friends' faith released healing into their friend, as intercession always does.

Read Mark 2:1-12. Get quiet before God. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your imagination. Picture yourself as one of the four friends carrying the paralyzed man. Take your time. Look at your friends, the crowd, Jesus. Write what you see.

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven, or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Mark 2:1-12

"Prayer is essentially a partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God toward the realization of His redemptive purposes on earth."

Jack Hayford

Day 5

Intercessory prayer accomplishes things in two directions. The intercessor in both cases is a "go-between."

- First, as intercessors pray for others, they serve as go-betweens to reconcile people to God, mediating grace, mercy, and love.
- Second, as intercessors pray, they interpose between the person in need and Satan as go-betweens to separate them from the Enemy of their souls.⁸⁸

D. L. Moody tells of meeting a woman at the altar when he had given a call for salvation. "Are you not already saved?" She assured him she was. Yet she replied, "I have a son who has gone far away; I thought I would take his place today and see if God would not bless him."⁸⁹ That is intercessory prayer.

The Church fulfills another function of intercession in two directions.

1. The Church must raise up watchers on the ramparts. They watch for messengers of the Lord. Isaiah 62:6 says, "Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest." Dutch Sheets comments on this passage:

“From the walls of the cities, they watched for two things: messengers and enemies. Their purpose in watching for messengers was to inform the gatekeepers when to open the gates and when to keep them closed...Seasoned watchmen are often alerted by the Holy Spirit, before ever having any concrete evidence, that certain messengers are not to be trusted.”⁹⁰

2. Watchers must also look for the enemies. Scripture gives explicit warning to watchers who fail to watch carefully and sound the warning in the day of danger (Ezek. 33:1-6). In fact, the most serious judgment falls on watchers who fail to watch. They have forsaken a sacred trust and others pay the price. As noted above, watchers must also look for messengers of good news and open the gates to them. Watchers must, therefore, open the gates to friends and close the gates to enemies. Neither responsibility can be shirked.

Watchers must diligently look for:

- 1. God's messengers and*
- 2. believers' enemies.*

What messengers should believers watch for, bringing good news from God?

What enemies might come against believers? How should we watch? How can we close the gate against enemies?

Three great truths stand for the Church as a house of prayer.

- First, God works through the Church; it is the channel through which Living Water flows (Matt. 18:18-19). “How big is the pipe, and how clear is it?” are questions the Church must never stop asking.
- Second, God wants harmony and unity in the Church; otherwise his work is hampered (John 17:11, 22). The indispensable ways of maintaining unity are through speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and through forgiving one another (Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35).
- Third, when God’s people gather, the Lord is there. In fact, he is the One who has *called* them together (Nee 16-35).

Spend time interceding for unity in your church and in the body of Christ in your community and around the world. Write a prayer for unity.

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 10

Discernment and Authority in Prayer— Learning to Listen in Prayer

Day 1

Spiritual discernment is the ability to see circumstances through the eyes and the heart of God. It is the ability to see beyond appearances to the truth. Discernment is both a gift of God and a gift of relationship. While some individuals may have the spiritual gift of discernment, all may learn to be more discerning. This happens naturally as people learn to be more observant. It happens spiritually as people draw more intimately to God's heart so they may more closely hear his voice. In this intimate relationship, intercessors can ask God for guidance and expect to receive it.

Believers are specifically told to ask:

"If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you." (Jas. 1:5)

In fact, failing to ask can be the very root of ignorance.

"You do not have, because you do not ask." (Jas. 4:2)

Since many have grown up in a church where they were taught not to expect God to speak to them (other than by scripture, for example), they neglect asking.

Dallas Willard offers guidelines for hearing God.⁹¹ I prefer to think of them as a framework in which to hear God, not a series of trite "how-to's" in order to seek a quick fix.

- (1) People can learn to live in a love relationship with God. It is more than hearing from God; it is being in an intimate relationship with him. That is why people recognize his voice (John 10:4).
- (2) People can learn to recognize that God does, indeed, speak to and work through ordinary humans. The heroes of the Bible were ordinary people (Acts 4:13;

14:11-15). They simply allowed the extraordinary power of God to flow through them.

- (3) People can learn to understand that Bible experiences were much like they would have experienced had they been there. Otherwise they will relegate the biblical accounts to dusty shelves of unreality they could never experience. God really connected with ordinary people then. He still does. (Jas. 5:17)
- (4) People can learn to be available. God is not remote; he is near. He wants to interact with this world. He wants to use people—if they will allow him. Unless people believe this they will never hear him because his voice may speak all day but it will fall on deaf ears. “Let anyone with ears to hear listen” (Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35).
- (5) People can learn to be meek before God so their desire truly is for his will to be done. Jesus’ prayer, “[Y]et, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). was no prayer of resignation or defeat. It was pure affirmation that God’s will was the best thing that could be done. “*Meekness is a real preference for God’s will* [emphasis mine].”⁹² People can learn to embrace humility before God.
- (6) This brings us to the *third* [original emphasis] preliminary truth that we must keep constantly before us in our search for a word from God: When God speaks to us, *it does not prove that we are righteous or even right* [original emphasis]. It does not even prove that we have correctly understood what he said. The infallibility of the messenger and the message does not guarantee the infallibility of our reception. Humility is always in order.⁹³
- (7) Willard further suggests the helpful approach of lining up what are called “the three lights:”
 - a. First, intercessors should note the quality of the voice speaking to them. God’s will has the ring of authority even if people are tempted to argue with it.

- b. Second, intercessors should note the spirit of the voice. If it is of God, it will have the timbre of peace, joy, good, and Jesus.
- c. Third, intercessors should note the content of the message. God's voice will always be consistent with his revelation in the Bible.⁹⁴

**Which of Willard's first six points is most challenging to you?
Which is most encouraging to you?**

Willard speaks of "the three lights" in point seven. What is needed on the part of the intercessor in order to line up these three lights?

What do you personally find most difficult about the concept of the three lights? Most helpful?

Day 2

In terms of understanding the need of the one for whom the intercessor is praying, Rick Bonfim suggests being aware of four possible “roots” out of which the person’s need grows: 1) rejection, 2) rebellion, 3) bitterness, and 4) unforgiveness:

Often these roots govern our responses to God and to others as [S]atan uses them to manipulate, intimidate, and dominate us. Rejection and rebellion are vertically oriented in that they primarily concern our relationship with God. Unforgiveness and bitterness are horizontally oriented in that they primarily concern our relationship with people.

A root is the primary area where prayer should begin. When praying, attack the root of the problem. Be specific enough so that the prayer can proceed toward other areas of the soul. It is the area where the Holy Spirit will focus, giving more information to formulate the prayer.⁹⁵

Typically, these roots manifest themselves as binding a person in one of three areas: 1) will, 2) mind, or 3) emotions.

1. For example, people who know God’s will but stubbornly refuse to obey are fighting a battle of the will.
2. People who have to solve everything with rational means may find their minds become the point at which they stumble in following God.
3. Those who have been deeply wounded by another person or by a traumatizing experience may need God to work a profound healing in their emotions. In each area, the issue is whether people will surrender to God and allow God’s will to prevail in their lives.

*Rick Bonfim on Discernment in Prayer*⁹⁶

<u><i>Discerning roots of need</i></u>	<u><i>Areas in which roots can bind</i></u>
<i>1. rejection</i>	<i>1. will</i>
<i>2. rebellion</i>	<i>2. mind</i>
<i>3. bitterness</i>	<i>3. emotions</i>
<i>4. unforgiveness</i>	

What do you see as strengths in Bonfim's framework for discernment?

What questions does it raise for you?

How can being aware of the will-mind-emotions trichotomy be helpful to the intercessor?

Day 3

Rick Bonfim's prayer method follows seven basic steps.⁹⁷ They flow in a logical sequence but do not rely on techniques or gimmicks. The discernment flows out of the intercessors' relationship to God. The prayer time itself finds intercessors in utter dependence on the Holy Spirit for direction and understanding. While Bonfim certainly commends looking at a person's demeanor for clues, the fact is that what one needs most is clarity of insight from the Holy Spirit.

Two important factors can come into play to cloud understanding when intercessors rely exclusively on people's own assessment of their needs. First, people may be deliberately hiding the genuine truth. Second, people may not truly understand their own need. For example, people may ask prayer

for a stomach ulcer when their true need is to forgive someone who hurt them. Bonfim urges such sensitivity to the Spirit so the intercessor can identify and pray to the true need, thus more effectively allowing healing and grace to flow.

Needless to say, such revelation should always be handled very carefully. We are not infallible (see Dallas Willard's # 6, p. 114) and should always maintain a sense of humility in discerning revelation. Sincerity is not enough because well-meaning people can be sincerely wrong. No accusations should be leveled. No attacks should be brought. For instance, if the intercessor senses that unforgiveness might be the real cause of the need, the intercessor might gently ask, "I'm wondering, is there any person who has deeply hurt you that you need to forgive?" Another possibility would be to pray in a general way for God to bring healing from any hurt and for forgiveness to flow wherever it is needed. Intercessors must remember that they are not there to bring accusation to the individual but to bring God's healing grace into the present moment. Intercessors are joining with the Holy Spirit in standing with the persons in need so that they may be restored to full health and a strong relationship with Jesus Christ.

- (1) Ask God for discernment—ask the Holy Spirit for *in-sight*. "[T]hey look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).
- (2) Seek confirmation from God's Holy Spirit—wait on the Lord:

When praying at the altar one can ask questions of the individual, but the best information is that which comes from the Holy Spirit. Many times an individual comes to the altar in desperate need but they are unable to realize or verbalize that need. The storm of stress and anxiety creates much noise and confusion, which interferes with their ability to see the condition of their soul.

- (3) Look for revelation of root work—try not to get lost in the symptoms but move to the root of rejection, rebellion, bitterness, or unforgiveness.
- (4) Invest yourself in soul service—ask the Holy Spirit if the person is bound in will, mind, or emotions.

- (5) Learn to understand command and authority—speak words that imply a command under the authority of Jesus Christ. Bonfim suggests intercessors actually stand as they pray to take authority over the need in Jesus' name.
- (6) Recognize the power of contact and transmission—lay on hands to facilitate the flow of the Holy Spirit for healing and cleansing. This must always be done appropriately, especially when touching a person of the opposite gender.
- (7) When finished praying, check around—keep in tune with the Holy Spirit and see where he may lead next.

Have you had a time when you felt God gave you a clear revelation about a truth that you could not have known apart from his divine revelation? If so, briefly describe your experience.

How does the idea of “command and authority” in prayer strike you? What questions does it raise?

Day 4

Authority in Prayer

Many segments of the Church have lost this remarkable element of authority in prayer. People pray without much expectation, becoming like James suggests—waves tossed on the sea (Jas. 1:6-7). Some people pray as though God were so feeble that he might not be able to defeat the Adversary (Satan) in his attacks. For these people, prayer is a kind of vague hope that things will turn out for the best.

We need not remain immersed in doubt over either God's power or God's willingness to help his children. What power and joy emerge when intercessors realize their standing in Christ. Their intercessions depend on the power of God, which is available to them through Christ's work at the cross and his victory over death. Believers are now raised to the spiritual realms with Jesus Christ. They stand positionally over a defeated foe. They need never submit to him. Rather, they can speak authoritatively as ambassadors for Christ in every situation.

Ed Silvano, in his excellent book, That None Should Perish, unpacks Ephesians 1:17-23 with a description of the power and authority that is ours in Jesus (see illustrations and description on pages 100-102). Since Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth and since God seats us with Christ in the heavenlies, we rightfully bear the same authority as Jesus. We do so not because we grasp the power but because God in his mercy has conferred it on us. To forsake taking up that authority is to spurn one of God's great gifts to his church—particularly in this matter of intercession.

Carefully read Ephesians 1:17-23:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Specifically name some things that have been put under Christ's feet.

Since we have been seated with Christ in the spiritual realms, over what can we rightfully take authority?

Authority comes not from the believers' words or actions. The intercessors' authority comes from the fact that they stand under the authority of Christ. His authority flows through them. This is the authority of the ambassador whose words bear the authority of the king. "We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20).

When Ephesians 2:6 says He "raised us up with Him," Christ is saying, "It's not only My victory, it's yours."

He is also saying, "What I have done, you must enforce. I have put them under my feet legally—under My authority—but you must exercise that authority in individual situations, causing the literal fulfillment of it."⁹⁸

Timid intercessors must grasp this divine truth—intercession is not about power but about authority. When intercessors take hold of Christ's authority, his power automatically is released. The Church must recognize that it has authority to act on Christ's behalf in the world. The altar intercessor has authority to act on Christ's behalf in every situation. Watchman Nee likens it to a man's giving his friend the seal to stamp his bank check. The point is that the man trusts his friend to be faithful in its use.⁹⁹ D. L. Moody likens it to a check that becomes valuable the instant the signature is put to it.¹⁰⁰ Such is the reason believers pray "in Jesus' name."

*Intercession is not about our own power
but about Christ's authority.*

Dwight L. Moody adds a simple story that illustrates the power of the name. A certain man's son, Charlie, went to war. One day a wounded soldier just back from the field came to the man. The soldier handed the father a note written by the man's son. It read, "This is my dearest friend. He has been wounded and has no one to care for him. Would you please help him?" He signed it, "For Charlie's sake." Here lay the secret. Here lay the power. The father could hardly do enough for him. He poured out his favor in response to the request from his beloved son, Charlie. Surely our heavenly Father could be no less willing to help when we ask "for Christ's sake."¹⁰¹

What prayer is God asking you to pray in faith right now? Write it down and end the prayer "for Christ's sake."

Day 5

One important note is in order. Believers do not always get what they ask; God can answer yes, no, or wait. What believers do know is this—God always works for their best. Believers often cannot see it at the moment; that is why they trust. "Thy will be done" is not resignation but the highest affirmation of trust. If believers have lived any time at all, they understand that they would have been in deep trouble if God—or even their parents—had given them all they asked.¹⁰²

In the film *Bruce Almighty*, Bruce is given God's power for a time. Unknown to Bruce, this includes getting all of God's prayer requests. Millions flood in. No matter how quickly he answers them, more pile up. Finally, in desperation, Bruce simply answers them all with a single sweeping "yes." What ensues is unmitigated disaster. In a subsequent conversation with God, the Almighty asks, "What makes you think people know what they want?" Even beyond that, what people want and what they truly need are often light years apart.

Gordon Fee elaborates on this theme:

Our asking is based on our limited knowledge, and all too often it is colored by our self-interest. We can only praise God that he does not answer every prayer “prayed in faith.” Hezekiah, after all, had his prayer answered and was granted fifteen more years, but it was during those years that Manasseh [one of Israel’s most evil kings] was born!¹⁰³

Every true child of God in the end would far rather pray “Thy will be done” than “my will be done.”¹⁰⁴

Dwight L. Moody

Can you recall a plea you made to God that was answered “no”—and later on you were glad?

How could you help a burdened person grasp the liberating freedom in Jesus’ words, “Thy will be done”?

With that caution having been spoken, however, believers may indeed take up the staff of Moses and the authority God grants his children. They have:

- authority toward people (Acts 3:2, 6; 4:12),
- authority toward the devil (Acts 16:18; Luke 10:17), and
- authority toward God (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24).

If the answer be different than requested or delayed in its coming, **Oswald Chambers** grants wise counsel:

Men ought always to pray, and not lose heart. Jesus also taught the disciples the prayer of patience. If you are right with God and God delays the answer to your prayer, don't misjudge Him. Don't think of Him as an unkind friend, or an unnatural father, or an unjust judge, but keep at it. Your prayer will certainly be answered, for "everyone who asks receives." Pray and do not cave in. Your heavenly Father will explain it all one day. He cannot just yet because He is developing your character.¹⁰⁵

Has anything ever happened (or is happening) in your life that has tempted you to give up on God? Did you give up for a time? What caused you to reclaim your faith?

How can you encourage those who have prayed long but have not received what they asked?

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 11

**Prayer and Healing—
Learning the Language of Intercession****Day 1**

Jesus sent his disciples out (Matt. 10:7-8) with three assignments—preach, heal, and cast out demons (confront the forces of darkness). Healing and dealing with those who have been demonized must be recaptured as part of the ministry of the Church. Ignorance and fear have often been obstacles in the believers' path. In addition, frauds and caricatures of true healing have made many believers hesitant. The Church must go beyond these barriers to reclaim what Jesus sent it forth to do.

In truth, most believers are dominated by the question, "What if the healing does not come?" This question is legitimate, but it is one born of fear rather than faith. The problem is that many have defined healing in too narrow a framework. They have reduced healing to an idea of people demanding certain things of God. If they do not get it, God is shown to be powerless, and believers are embarrassed.

Many have quickly turned the concept of our submission to the perfect will of God to requiring God's submission to the "perfect" will of humanity.

Believers must break this small-minded misconception and let God be God. Through faith, the Church needs to recapture the balance of God's power and God's purpose. All people are in a sin-fractured world. Certainly, God could heal every disease. However, in his sovereign wisdom and purpose, he chooses not to physically heal in every case. The Church needs to step forward in unutterable confidence in God and let God be God. Believers can, indeed, trust ultimately in his sovereignty. The Church at its own peril foolishly attempts to reduce God to a divine bellhop who jumps at our every whim. Many have quickly turned the concept of our submission to the perfect will of God to requiring God's submission to the "perfect" will of humanity.

The purpose of this session is neither to examine why prayers are not always answered nor to give a final prophetic answer to the problem of pain and suffering in the world. It is, however, to acknowledge that God is sovereign. Believers can ask him anything and can come boldly to him. Then they leave the answer in his hands and trust him. He knows best, and his will is perfect. The believers' goal in praying about human will and God's will should be to pray until God's will becomes their will. To this day, I remember the little rhyme taught me by Dr. Bill Arnett, one of my seminary professors:

I will my will to do God's will
and then to will is well.
The willing will that does God's will
within God's will will dwell.¹⁰⁶

While that may be bad poetry, it is good theology. The Psalmist proclaims, "Those who know your name put their trust in you. For you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you" (Ps. 9:10).

A person confronted me after a service. "You know when you came by and prayed for me? Your prayer didn't work!" How would you respond?

How would you respond to those who see death as defeat? Consider this in light of the fact that we are a resurrection people.

Day 2

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

(Matthew 7:7-8)

Meditate on the preceding scripture. Ask God for divine insight to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Write it down.

Day 3

Having acknowledged that God operates with insight in areas where we are without sight, believers can proceed in this matter of healing to ask. “You do not have, because you do not ask” (Jas. 4:2).

Our petitions and intercession are effective and powerful when they are concrete expressions of our trust in the goodness and love of God. If we trust God's goodness and love, we can confidently put others and ourselves in God's hands.¹⁰⁷

Maxie Dunnam

Prayer, then, leads us far beyond ourselves. Dunnam again offers keen insight:

There is mystery in pain. We should not hesitate to affirm that God wills physical as well as spiritual wholeness....Yet, Christians know pain and infirmity from which they are not delivered. The lesson is clear: the goal of our praying is not primarily deliverance from pain and suffering, but that ... God's purposes shall be accomplished, that Christ's sufficient grace shall be realized.¹⁰⁸

Intercessors come prepared to pray and ask boldly. They do not come cringing because they come to their heavenly Father who is more eager to give than they are to ask (Matt. 7:11). They do not come hesitantly because they come to a King who is sufficient for every need.

*Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring,
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much.*

John Newton

Henry Blackaby reminds us in Experiencing God that we can know we are doing God's will if we are called to do something so big that apart from God we will fail.¹⁰⁹ What God-sized task is God calling you to do? To pray for?

Day 4

Intercessors do not come to God fearfully because the very Son who has redeemed them by his blood escorts them into the throne room of Almighty God. “Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Believers can come with confidence to God and ask, as children would trustingly ask parents who love them. With equal confidence, believers can ask, then trust that the Father has a perfect plan. Understanding God’s will can wait; obeying God’s will cannot.

People might legitimately ask whether this means they will never feel afraid. The honest answer is that people will, indeed, face times when they fear. However, the stalwart hold on fast to the unshakable Word of God even in times of peril. In other words, their fear does not bind them. Rather faith propels them into obedience that transcends their fears.

Georgia Ellis writes with utter confidence in God through life’s storms:

If there were no sickness, we would never know that God could heal; if there were no storms, we would never know that God will speak peace; if there were no hurting people, we would never know that he binds up the wounds of the brokenhearted.¹¹⁰

Note carefully this does not mean that God sends storms and heartbreaks into people’s lives; it does mean that God uses the very instruments of our broken world as a means to release his divine grace into people’s lives. Here is where we bring Romans 8:28 to bear in every circumstance.

Look up Romans 8:28 and write it down, putting your name in to personalize it.

What storms have you experienced that have taken you deeper in your faith and your walk with God?

Write down Genesis 50:20.

Scan back over the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. He was sold into slavery, falsely accused, thrown into prison, and forgotten even when he helped someone. Why do you think Joseph could still make this statement?

What does it say about how Joseph looked at God?

What does it say about how he looked at circumstances?

What does it say about how he looked at people?

Day 5

As believers intercede for those God brings to the altar, they can do so with grace. In fact, every time someone prays, grace is released. They can speak with authority but always with ethical integrity. They never embarrass or humiliate. They pray quietly and deal with people privately in matters of sensitivity, just as Jesus did.¹¹¹ The manner in which intercessors lead people before God should liberate, not induce guilt.¹¹² Sample prayers using language that gets to the root while praying in a way that does not demean are found on page 162.

*Every time someone prays,
grace is released.*

How does the above statement speak to situations where prayers are apparently unanswered (or answered “no”)?

Can you recall a time or circumstance in your life or someone else’s when this grace shone through when the answer did not come as the person had prayed?

Intercessory Concerns

CHAPTER 12

**Joining in the Ministry of Jesus—
Learning to Love in Prayer****Day 1**

Intercession is love on its knees. Prayer is not the *least* believers can do but the *most* they can do. They can do *more* than pray, but they cannot do more *until* they pray. In prayer, intercessors join those who are dear to them and enter into the presence of Jesus together to ask him to help them. No privilege could be greater.

The four men who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus loved him and were persuaded Jesus could help the man. They persevered, undeterred by the crowds. They found a way to bring the man to Jesus. They could not help their friend, but they knew Jesus could. This story paints a powerful picture of intercessory prayer. Love on its knees led to love on its feet. It also led to their friend's being put on his feet. Such can be the result when believers intercede at the altar for those who come with needs.

Read these two passages. Ask God for a Spirit-led imagination as you picture yourself in each situation. Take your time. Pay attention to details as though you were there. What is God teaching you from these passages?

Luke 8:40-56

Matthew 8:5-13

Day 2

When believers intercede for someone, Jesus has already interceded and for them. As a matter of fact, he is interceding at that very moment as well.

Day by day and hour by hour Christ prays for us... He intercedes for us compassionately, for ... he knows exactly what we need.... His effective intercessory ministry was not confined to his life on earth; it is continued in heaven.¹¹³

Ray Anderson is right:

There is only one ministry—it is the ministry of Christ. All other ministry is rooted in this ministry and is the continuation of this ministry through the church, in the power of the Spirit, and on behalf of the world.¹¹⁴

Intercessors need never fear; they are operating hand in hand with the divine Intercessor, Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:25). *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words”* (Rom. 8:26). Believers simply partner with the Son and the Spirit to ask of the Father who delights to bless his children. Intercessors are not burdened with doing ministry *for* Christ; they are confidently doing ministry *with* Christ. They are only extending his ministry of grace to a world that needs it desperately but usually does not know it.

Ask the Holy Spirit for his help as you serve as an altar prayer minister. Spend some time in prayer for the others who are part of the covenant team. Write their names here before the Lord as you intercede for them personally.

Day 3

Jesus never intercedes casually or trivially. Hebrews 5:7 explains that he often prayed with “loud cries and tears.” Note also that his prayers were heard not for their volume but because of his submission. Likewise, believers are to come to the altar to pray in submission to God. The disciples knew nothing of prayer until they saw the Master at prayer. When they saw him praying, prayer became the one thing they asked him to teach them. Prayer was not a part of Jesus’ life; it was the artesian spring from which all of his life flowed.

Prayer was the secret of His power, the law of His life, the inspiration of His toil, and the source of His wealth, His joy, His communion and strength. To Christ Jesus prayer occupied no secondary place, but was exacting and paramount, a necessity, a life, the satisfying of a restless yearning, and a preparation for heavy responsibilities.¹¹⁵

Here we arrive at the remarkable truth that in prayer believers actually partner with Jesus in his ministry. They can develop the same concerns he has. As Jesus interceded in John 17, believers, too, can ask God to give them a passion for the glory of God, for the work of his church, and for the salvation of the world.

A guest in the home of A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, told of coming upon Simpson early one morning in his study. There sat Simpson alone with his arms encircling a globe of the world. Tears coursed down his cheeks. He was literally weeping for a world lost in sin.¹¹⁶ This type of prayer is intercession that enters into the very heart of God. Such intercessions will always be heard in heaven.

There sat Simpson alone with his arms encircling a globe of the world. Tears coursed down his cheeks. He was literally weeping for a world lost in sin.

Clearly, Simpson prayed with burning passion. However, the secret was not that he himself was so passionate. The powerful truth is that *Jesus was praying through him*. He was able to see the world as Jesus does, feel for the world as Jesus does, and plead for the world as Jesus does. Indeed, the Spirit of Christ prays in every believer.¹¹⁷

Ask God to give you compassion for his lost world. Find a globe or world map and ask God to give you a heart for the nations. Take 15 minutes and look slowly over the world. What nations are in the news? Where is there crisis, war, hunger, or disaster? Where is the good news of Jesus prohibited? Pray around the world. Name any missionaries that you know of personally. Note names and places below.

* * * * *

Day 4

Intercessors can find fresh strength, courage, and confidence when they recognize that not only is Christ praying *in* them and *through* them, but he is also praying *for* them. Among the intercessions he lifts for them, what joy to consider that he prays for them as he did for Peter. *“I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers”* (Luke 22:32).

Here is a prayer for believers to be kept from sin. Here also is a prayer that should sin overtake them, they would be restored both personally and for ministry. Since they have been redeemed, intercessors have the joy of bringing others to the Redeemer. Jesus is the One who calls them and is the One who meets all their needs. Jesus allows intercessors the high privilege of being the conduit of that healing grace.

* * * * *

In order to prepare to intercede for their friends, Barbara Wentroble suggests four steps.¹¹⁸

1. They can seek from God a cleansed heart. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10);
2. They can ask God for deliverance from fear. “There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear” (1 Pet. 4:8);
3. They can ask God to give strong faith. “Jesus said to him, ‘If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes’” (Mark 9:23); and,
4. They can ask God to clothe them in his righteousness. “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27).

Intercessors stand with the one for whom they intercede as Christ himself. They do not simply represent Christ; they *represent* Christ. In this moment, they do not vaguely point the seeker to heaven, but Jesus comes to meet them on earth. Robert Law is quoted as saying, “The purpose of prayer is not to get man’s will done in heaven, but to get God’s will done on earth.”¹¹⁹ The intercessors’ goal is God’s glory.

Focus today on one person for whom your heart is burdened. Ask God to show you how that person truly feels (i.e. hostile, fearful, hopeless, etc.). This may be painful. Take your time. Now ask for God’s grace and mercy to meet that person and circumstance. Note what God shows you and says to you.

Day 5

Meditate on the following passage, which is our theme verse for altar prayer ministry. Let it become a passion for your heart. Read it in ultra-slow fashion. Note what God shows you since you have taken this journey of faith with him.

*On him we have set our hope
that he will continue to deliver us,
as you help us by your prayers.*

2 Cor. 1:10-11 (NIV)

Intercessory Concerns

AFTERWORD

What began as a project ended up for me as a spiritual journey. Every step of the way, I became increasingly aware of my inadequacy. Furthermore, I felt under considerable spiritual attack. How deeply grateful I am to my 40+ faithful prayer soldiers who hold up the Pastor's Prayer Shield at Martha Bowman UMC. Only eternity will reveal the effectiveness of their prayers as well as the blows they took from the Enemy of our souls because they stood in the gap on my behalf.

Their intercession has been a living example of what it means to lift someone before the Lord. One reason I have learned so much about intercession is that I have been its beneficiary. Initially, I felt awkward about receiving prayer from so many people in the form of the Prayer Shield. Then I realized these dear ones were simply responding to God's call. Also, the truth is that no one knows better than I the depth of my need. I am truly blessed and grateful beyond words.

In preparing this study, my own spiritual journey has put within me a fresh hunger for more of God. More and more I desire a relationship that runs deep, one that seeks God himself and not merely his gifts.

The greatest joy and faith builder in my pilgrimage has been this recurring emphasis—intercession isn't about confidence in our words but about unshakable confidence in the sufficiency of Jesus.

You have honored me by joining me on this journey. I began with the goal of putting some useful tools in your intercessors' toolbox. I hope I have succeeded in some measure. My parting goal is to reiterate my conviction that the best gift of all is the knowledge that there's plenty of room in the toolbox for other tools. Find them and use them!

Could I end with a caution? This material matters little apart from application. The intent never was to merely grow knowledge but to encourage people to engage in ministry. Keep faithful to the team. Keep to the task. Don't just talk about intercession—intercede!

“On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:10-11 NIV).

1—SOME PRACTICAL MINISTRY TEAM GUIDELINES

Remember that you are here to serve the person who comes to the altar. Your role is not to fix the person or accuse the person! What the person needs is an ongoing relationship with God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. This divine encounter can be life transforming. After all, they are meeting the One who makes all things new. Your role is to come alongside them in prayer to help them into the presence of the One who alone can help them. It is not your ministry; it is Jesus' ministry that he is extending through you. What freedom!

See your role as blessing, encouraging, comforting, and strengthening the one who comes for prayer. There may be some rare times you are called to lovingly confront a person. However, this does not give you license to tell someone what to do. It is God's work to convict, convince, and correct—not yours.

The truth is all of us feel inadequate in this ministry. Good news! That is when we are most open to the Holy Spirit. When we agree with Jesus words, "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), we are humble enough to allow him to work. Paul reminds us, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

* * * * *

Following are some practical guidelines that you may find helpful. Again, be sensitive to the particular situation and individual. Your response should fit the need. [Space is left at the end for you to add your own insights.]

- Pray in pairs whenever possible—this is ministry from the body of Christ.
- Whenever possible, minister with the same gender.
- Listen to the person—but listen even more to the voice of God.
- Be honest—don't lie to God or the person; it's okay not to have all the answers.
- Pray often with your eyes open—you can see what the Holy Spirit is doing or how the person is responding to God's work.
- Avoid hurrying or rushing—be quiet before the Lord.
- Believe that God wants to use you—you are chosen (John 15:16).

- Give full attention to the one for whom you are praying—that person needs to know he/she is the most important person to you right then.
- Never make a person feel inadequate or that they are resisting God’s Spirit because they aren’t receiving a particular manifestation.
- Laying on of hands should be done appropriately—a light touch generally to forehead, top of head, shoulders, or hands, but be very judicious: touch can easily be misinterpreted (sexual or reminder of abuse, etc.).
- Ask God to reveal appropriate scripture to pray over the person.
- “Build” a prayer—ask the person what specifics they would like lifted up.
- Don’t try to force the person into an experience like you have had—let the Holy Spirit have his own way in each person’s life.
- Pay attention to personal hygiene—breath mints, deodorant, clean hands, hair, and clothes won’t redeem a person, but lack of them can hinder a person!
- Get someone to pray with you if you need help—power/wisdom are in team ministry.
- Stand in prayer whenever authoritative prayer is needed—we don’t bow before Satan.
- Pray in a normal tone—speaking louder doesn’t give you more spiritual authority.
- Minister with a childlike heart—there is no comparing to another’s gifts or ministry.
- If someone becomes disruptive, take them to a side place to pray.
- Don’t try to manipulate—we don’t use the Holy Spirit; he uses us as he chooses.
- You’re not after “spiritual scalps”—you want people to come to God to get his help.
- Get a name and refer a person when deeper counseling or deliverance is needed.
- Affirm another’s prayer by “amen,” “yes,” “I agree,” or gentle sound of affirmation.

2—MORE PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ALTAR PRAYER

- Ask in a non-confrontational manner—“How can I pray WITH you?” or “How would you like me to pray WITH you?” [“With” is even better than “for.”]
- In the interview, get the salient information and pray. This is not time for them to rehearse every detail. Don’t spend all your time talking with each other; talk to God.
- When you feel direction, you can gently ask a probing question, “Is there anything that you need to confess to God and get that settled?”
- When you feel direction, you can gently ask, “Is there anyone you need to forgive?” or “Is there a relationship that needs healing in your life?”
- Pray as specifically as you can. Target the need.
- Don’t focus on the problem or be negative. Pray positively to build the person up and give them hope.
- “Listen” to the person’s body language. It is one way God can reveal things to you.
- Be warm and affirming toward the person.
- Don’t pretend to be a “know-it-all”—you aren’t! It isn’t about your advice, but that person encountering God and finding his help.
- You can invite the person to turn palms down to release something in prayer.
- You can invite the person to turn palms up to be receptive to God in prayer. Don’t miss the power of the body in prayer.
- There are times you may want to invite the person to lift their face upward to receive hope and help. Bowed over locks the body; looking up opens it in receptivity.
- There is a time when you might pray for a person and invite that person to repeat your prayer line by line when they aren’t able to pray on their own.

- Pray in normal English, not King James. He's been dead for many years now!
- During the prayer time, you can stop and ask, "Do you sense God saying anything?" or "Are you aware of God doing anything?" or "What's going on?" Then you can adjust your prayer accordingly.
- If in doubt, ask permission to lay hands on people, explaining that it is biblical.
- Be aware of people's personal space and don't invade.
- If you feel the need to get another intercessor to pray with you, explain the situation, stating that you will be right back.
- If you feel a word from the Lord, offer it in a way that the other person can reject it without embarrassment. "Do you think God could be speaking to you about...?"
- It's always appropriate to start your prayer, "Holy Spirit, come."
- Don't exaggerate or engage in phony "religious" language. Be real.
- Encourage them to be expectant. Open hands can be helpful here.
- Many times people are consumed by their problems. Encourage them to focus on Jesus. *Glance at the problem but gaze at Jesus.*
- Don't be disappointed if "nothing happens." It is God's ministry, not yours. He can work gradually or immediately, but he works in every situation.
- Stop praying when the Spirit says to, you can't think of anything else, the person tells you it is over, or if you feel you aren't making any more progress.
- At the end, always assure them of God's love.
- Encourage them to find a small group for continued help and support.

3—MODIFIED VINEYARD PRAYER MODEL

John Wimber, founder of the Association of Vineyard Churches, has developed a helpful model for entering into intercessory prayer with others. His five-step process is as follows:

1. The interview
2. The diagnostic decision
3. The prayer selection
4. The prayer engagement
5. The post-prayer directions. ~~X~~

* * * * *

Charles Kraft, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, expands the Vineyard model to a seven-step process.¹²¹ [Space is provided for you to add your own insights.]

1. Invite the Holy Spirit to come, reveal his will, and lead the ministry time.
 - a. *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts”* (Zech. 4:6).
 - b. It clearly delineates that this is the Spirit’s work, not people’s.
 - c. “Holy Spirit, we ask you to come and lead this time of ministry. Reveal to us what you would have us do and enable us to work with you to fulfill the purpose of God.”
 - d.
2. Ask the blessing of God upon the person receiving ministry.
 - a. *“If God is for us, who is against us?”* (Rom 8:31)
 - b. This brings relaxation, peace, comfort, faith, hope, and trust to the person.
 - c. Father, bless this person with a deeper experience of your presence, with patience, with faith, with power to forgive, with godly insight, with joy, with mercy, etc.
 - d.

3. The interview
 - a. *“What do you want me to do for you?”* (Matt. 20:32)
 - b. *“How can I pray for [with] you?”*
 - c. Listen with physical *and* spiritual ears.
 - d.

4. Tentative diagnosis
 - a. *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”* (Rom. 8:26-27)
 - b. Ask the Holy Spirit, *“Why does this person have this need?”*
 - c.

5. Tentative prayer strategy
 - a. What type of prayer will be most helpful in this situation?
 - b. Healing? Intercessory? Agreement? Deliverance? Salvation? Hope? Etc.
 - c.

6. Take the situation before the Lord
 - a. This is the actual time of intercession, usually with laying on of hands (Mk. 5:41).
 - b. Pray with authority, for Jesus is praying through you by the Spirit (Mk. 1:27).
 - c.

7. Post-prayer counseling
 - a. Encourage the person. Ask how they are feeling (Mk. 8:23-25).
 - b. Is there anything else? Refer for further counseling, if needed.
 - c. Encourage the person to keep personal and corporate spiritual disciplines.
 - d. If appropriate, you might ask, *“Can I call you later to check on how you’re doing?”*
 - e.

4—VARIETY OF NEEDS AT THE ALTAR

Perhaps many think of the altar call as only relating to salvation. While this is one primary use for the altar, people also come to the altar with a wide range of needs.

One of the great opportunities of this time comes from the reclamation of the altar as a place to meet God no matter what the need may be. Note that in the Old Testament, sacrifice at the altar occurred for a variety of reasons. Therefore, be prepared to meet people with a wide range of needs. Furthermore, people may come not only for themselves but also in behalf of another.

Listen carefully to the person's description of the need. But listen just as intently to the Spirit's voice. He may reveal an issue that may be the deepest need in that person's life. For instance, the paralyzed man in Mark 2 was brought for physical healing. But Jesus dealt first with his greatest need—forgiveness of sins. That opened the door to physical health.

[Pastors can note these suggestions and add many more. These can be useful in planning invitations. Pastors can target their message to a felt need and invite people to bring that concern to Jesus at the altar.]

* * * * *

Some of the needs you may encounter at the altar include:

- ❖ Salvation
- ❖ Rededication of life to Christ
- ❖ Forgiveness
- ❖ Healing of broken relationships
- ❖ Broken heart for a lost/prodigal child
- ❖ Deliverance from addiction (alcohol, drugs, pornography)
- ❖ Fullness of the Holy Spirit
- ❖ Comfort in grief
- ❖ Healing of body
- ❖ Healing of the mind
- ❖ Strength to face difficult circumstances

- ❖ Help in a struggling marriage
- ❖ Assurance of salvation
- ❖ Cleansing from sin
- ❖ Financial struggles
- ❖ Loneliness
- ❖ Fear of the future/something else
- ❖ Guidance/direction
- ❖ Peace in times of personal storm
- ❖ Conflict at work
- ❖ Boldness to witness
- ❖ Freedom from anger
- ❖ Purity of language
- ❖ Want to have a child
- ❖ Victory from overeating
- ❖ Know God really loves them
- ❖ Restoration of joy
- ❖ Freedom from guilt
- ❖ Wisdom to be a godly parent
- ❖ Coming back to God from the far country
- ❖ Bless someone they love
- ❖ Desire to be married
- ❖ Be unchained from the past
- ❖ God to control the person's finances
- ❖ _____
- ❖ _____
- ❖ _____

5—THE ROLE OF AN ALTAR PRAYER MINISTER

The Altar Prayer Minister is to come alongside people on behalf of the whole body of Christ to minister and help them encounter the living God in Christ. We are not called to give our opinions but to share what the Word of God has to say on any given subject. Therefore, we should keep learning more about the Word of God so we can recall applicable scriptures in times of need.

In order to be prepared for such personal ministry, there are some characteristics we should ask God to develop in us. Following are some of the attributes that are essential.

By God's grace, we must:

- Maintain a cleansed life—Psalm 139:23; 1 John 1:9
- Have compassion and love toward others—1 Cor. 13:4-8; Col. 3:14
- Learn to encourage others in the Lord—1 Thess. 5:8-11
- Have great patience—2 Tim 2:24-25; Gal. 5:22
- Be a good listener (to people and God)—Heb. 4:15-16
- Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit—1 John 4:1-6
- Not be easily discouraged—Gal. 6:9
- Trust God to perform his work in people's lives—Phil. 2:13
- Have confidence God will supply us with the words we need—Mt. 10:19-20
- Not be judgmental, but very discerning—Rom 2:1; 14:10
- Be trustworthy, never betraying confidential information—Prov. 11:13
- Be faithful to fulfill the commitment to this/all areas of ministry—1 Cor. 4:2
- Be consistent in reading the Word of God and in personal prayer—Col. 3:16; Prov. 4:20-23; 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:1

*On him we have set our hope
that he will continue to deliver us,
as you help us by your prayers.*

2 Corinthians 1:10-11 (NIV)

Always remember it is not your work you are doing; it is Jesus' work that he is doing through you. Relax, trust, and invite the Holy Spirit to apply the grace of Jesus in this situation. You are just a temporary assistant to the Holy Spirit. He is the one doing the work. He is simply doing his work through you. Your job is to be available for his use.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer
and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will
guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:6-7

6—ARE YOU READY TO PRAY?

No athlete jumps into the competition without preparation. No student goes to a test without studying. No general goes to war without a plan. No craftsman begins working without the proper equipment.

Every person should be as diligent to prepare for prayer. Consider these questions not in the light of the moment of prayer but in the context of living a life of prayer before God.

An unknown author has compiled these excellent biblically based questions:

* * * * *

Are all sins confessed?

1 John 1:10

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Are all relationships with others made right?

Matthew 5:23-24

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Have you forgiven those who have hurt you?

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Are you seeking God in all things?

1 John 5:14-15

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Are you seeking to glorify and please God above all things?

John 14:13-14

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Are you depending on the Holy Spirit's guidance?

Romans 8:26-27

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us...in accordance with God's will.

Are you trusting your Lord in spite of what seems to be?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Will you praise God no matter what?

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Do you desire God's will above all things?

Luke 22:42

Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

Are you praying expectantly?

James 1:5-6

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

Do you believe God has your best in mind?

Jeremiah 29:11

I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

7—RICK BONFIM ON FOUR ROOTS OF NEED¹²²

When praying for a person, ask the Holy Spirit what the person's true need is. The person may mask it or may not even be aware of it. When the Spirit reveals the root, one is able to graciously pray right to the point of need.

* * * * *

1. Rejection

- a. The root of rejection is created as family or peers in society reject a child. Feeling unwanted and unloved, these persons consequently feel alienated from God as well. Satan steals away the assurance of God's love and mercy, thus robbing these persons of joy and of power to witness.
- b. This can manifest itself in insecurity, withdrawal, escape, passivity, rejection of parents, hopelessness, negativity, despair, etc.
- c. Now there was a woman who...came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped (Luke 8:43-44). [Note that her condition alienated her from society—untouchable—and also from God, for she could not enter worship ceremonially unclean.]

2. Rebellion

- a. The root of rebellion is essentially exercising self-will in opposition to God's will. It sets itself up above God and exalts itself above the Word of God. Intellect and pride separate people from God. If the root of rejection begins when people feel alienated from people, the root of rebellion occurs when people resentfully turn away from God.
- b. This can manifest itself in egocentricity, desire to control, disobedience to God, self-will, insistence of understanding everything, idolatry, etc.
- c. But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die..." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:4-6)

3. Bitterness

- a. The root of bitterness grows out of deep resentment toward a person or God. This root affects the body more than any other, since its roots go deep. It poisons the person and all relationships. Its lines of hardness, grief, and anguish are often etched in the face. Bitterness results when one obsesses over a memory, refusing to let it go. It erects barriers to love.
- b. This can manifest itself in resentment, self-accusation, joylessness, quick temper, manipulation, control, destructiveness, hardness, etc.
- c. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin. (Acts 8:22-23)

4. Unforgiveness

- a. The root of unforgiveness is relational. Since it breaks our relationship with people, it breaks our relationship with God. If held long, it can move toward deep bitterness. The need is for healing of emotions and spirit.
- b. This can manifest itself in cursing parents, quarreling spirit, accusation, criticism, faultfinding, persecution, alienation from people, etc.
- c. For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14-15)

8—UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL WARFARE

To encounter the Bible at all is to confront the genuine existence of evil. To dismiss the demonic as ancient superstition is not only to scorn the clear word of scripture but also to live parochially in our world. Satan works in different ways in different settings. People in countries such as the Dominican Republic don't debate the power of the demonic; they encounter it as starkly as any in biblical times.

- Jesus constantly cast out demons as part of his ministry.
 - *If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.* (Matt. 12:27-28)
- Jesus sent his disciples out to cast out demons as well as to preach and heal.
 - *So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.* (Mark 6:12-13)
- John clearly states that Jesus came to destroy Satan's work.
 - *The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.* (1 John 3:8)
- Satan opposed Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry, tempting him in the wilderness.
 - *He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan.* (Mark 1:13)
- Paul says that we are fighting the forces of darkness, not flesh and blood.
 - *Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* (Eph. 6:11-13)
- Paul talks about the nature of this spiritual warfare.
 - *Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.* (2 Cor 10:3-5)

- Peter likewise sounds a warning about our Enemy.
 - *Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.* (1 Peter 5:8)

Biblical information on confronting the demonic:

- Casting out demons is not enough. Always we must bring in the presence of God or disaster ensues. (Matt. 12:43-45)
- Believers have been given authority to bind demonic spirits and loose godly spirits. (Matt. 16:15-19)
- Some types of ungodly spirits: fear (2 Tim. 1:7), bondage (Rom. 8:15), jealousy (Num. 5:14, 30), seducing (1 Tim. 4:1), antichrist (1 John 4:3), heaviness (Isa. 61:3), haughtiness (Prov. 16:8), whoredom (Jer. 13:27; Hos. 1:2)
- Three tools of Satan:
 1. Manipulation
 2. Intimidation
 3. Domination
- Three major weapons of Satan:
 1. Temptation—Matt 4:3
 2. Deception—2 Cor. 11:14
 3. Accusation—Rev. 12:10
- Satan's purpose is threefold: steal our blessing, kill our spirit (relationship with God), destroy our soul (mind/will/emotion)
- Four types of demons: 1) spirits of the occult, 2) spirits of sin leading to oppression, 3) spirits of trauma, 4) ancestral spirits
- Four levels of demonic influence:
 1. Temptation and physical attacks
 2. Obsession
 3. Oppression (many people experience this)
 4. Possession (less common)
- Three types of sin: 1) lust of the flesh (Gen. 3:6), 2) lust of the eyes (Matt. 4:1-10), 3) pride of life (1 John 2:16)
- Get someone to pray with you. There is power in united prayer. (Matt. 18:20)
- Stand in authority, don't kneel, before a demonic presence.
- Don't negotiate; command the demon to leave on the authority of Jesus' victory at the cross. The power is not in the intercessor but in the blood of Christ. (Acts 16:18)
- Don't get focused on the demonic; focus on Jesus.
- A maintained prayer life accompanied by fasting gives power in the face of demonic attack. (Mark 9:29)
- Remember that "*greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.*" (1 John 4:4)
- Always speak in "*the Name of Jesus.*" (Phil. 2:10)

9—UNDERSTANDING THE SOUL/HEART NEEDS OF PEOPLE

A key to understanding the Hebrew concept of individuals is that every person is viewed as a single unit. Genesis 2:7 states, *“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”* (KJV). Soul (*nephesh*) refers to the totality of the person. The person is more than a conglomeration of parts. In fact, every aspect of a person affects every other part. For example, shalom means more than peace. It means harmony. For a person to have shalom is for every aspect of the person to be in synchronicity.

At the same time, in practical terms it is helpful to recognize that the soul of a person includes the aspects of mind, will, and emotions. They are like the three legs on a stool. Satan can bring his attack at any point, toppling the whole. When praying for a person, the Holy Spirit may reveal a direction to pray concerning one of these areas. All three can be affected by our own sin, the sins of others, and/or demonic attack.

* * * * *

Mind

- *“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”* (2 Cor. 4:4).
- Sometimes people’s minds create a block to receiving God’s grace. People feel they must understand everything before they can step forward in faith. They have a hard time accepting that *“we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Cor. 5:7).
- Biblical example: Acts 17:15-34 Athenian men

- Practical example: Intellectualism, pride, rationalization, ego centered

Will

- *“For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents..., swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!”* (2 Tim. 3:2-5).
- Here is where people understand the truth but refuse to accept it. Self-will is exalted over God’s will. The issue is not ignorance but disobedience.
- Biblical example: Acts 8:9-24 Simon

- Practical example: Stubborn, dominant, disobedient, self-willed

Emotions

- *“And when [Jesus] had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain...Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones”* (Mark 5:2-5).
- More and more we find people with damaged emotions around us. People have suffered physical abuse, rejection, abandonment, violence, curses, abusive words, sexual predators, etc. These wounds are not superficial but deeply rooted. They need healing of damaged emotions.
- Note: People often don’t feel instantly healed. Help them see they forgive by an act of will—that’s their part. Healing of damaged emotions is God’s part and often takes time.
- Biblical example: 1 Samuel 16:23 Saul

- Practical example: Anxiety, fear, stress, hostility, hypersensitivity

10—RICK BONFIM'S DYNAMICS OF ALTAR PRAYER¹²³

Every persons comes to the altar in need of healing, so all prayer is healing prayer. However, do not look on every person who comes as a problem to be fixed but as a person to be loved. Love each person into wholeness in the name of Jesus.

1. Discernment

- This is a revelation from the Holy Spirit about a person or situation. The Spirit helps you see what otherwise you could not. The litmus test is whether one is speaking to the true need of the individual. Discernment unlocks revelation. Pray for the Holy Spirit to clearly show the need.
-

2. Confirmation

- Look for corroboration of direction that is revealed. For instance, is there anything in the posture or demeanor of the person that confirms the revelation? Is there some response that shows that the discernment is clearly on target and not awry? Ask the Spirit to help you read the person/situation.
-

3. Root work

- Discernment reveals the root cause of the need as the Holy Spirit leads one to assess the situation. The four roots are rejection, rebellion, bitterness, and unforgiveness. Start with rejection (person-ward) and rebellion (God-ward). Then move to bitterness and unforgiveness to see if these are underlying causes. Like a doctor deals with the root of a disease, so we must stay with the root. When the root is touched, symptoms lose their power.
-

4. Soul service

- Consider the mind, will, and emotion of the person. In which area is the need manifested? Invite Jesus to come and speak to that need. He sets the captive free, exposes Satan's lies, and reveals the truth to the person.

5. Command and authority
 - Speak words that imply a command under the authority given to us by Jesus. We do not pray in our authority but that of Jesus. We simply appropriate the authority and victory of Jesus and apply them to the need at hand. *“So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God”* (2 Cor 5:20).
 -
6. Contact and transmission
 - Lay on hands in the name of Jesus that the power of the Holy Spirit may flow for healing, cleansing, restoration, and encouragement. We do not do this on our own strength but transmit Jesus’ power. That is why we can pray with authority. *“Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal”* (Luke 9:1-2). Note that authority is given to preach, heal, and confront demonic forces.
 -
7. Check around
 - Stay sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and see where he may be leading next. The ongoing relationship with Christ builds sensitivity in our spirit to God’s Holy Spirit. *“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me”* (John 10:27).
 -

SAMPLE PRAYERS FROM RICK BONFIM¹²⁴

Rejection

Father, in the name of Jesus, Lord, my brother has a broken heart because he feels rejected by his mother. This is his identity. Lord, he has lost his perspective of prayer. He has lost his perspective of what he can do to change the situation. He is becoming a victim instead of a winner in that relationship. Lord, I pray that this friend will now take the sword of the Spirit and assume a position of warfare against the attacks from Satan through this hurt from his mother. He will not fall by the wayside but be a victorious Christian. So I break rejection within him and speak to freedom in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Rebellion

Father, in the name of Jesus, my sister comes complaining about feeling that she is rejected at home. She is angry with her husband and is minimizing him. He is already insecure because she is so strong. I come against years of rejection that have caused her to feel second-class, insufficient, and unable. Father, in the name of Jesus, I command that the spirit of rejection come out of her. Take the wounds of her soul, the wounds of her mind, and help her to forgive. I set her free from hatred and every attitude of rebellion.

Bitterness

Father, in the name of Jesus, I come against bitterness in my brother's life. In your Word you say that anyone who curses another brings reproach. I ask you to bring healing to his bitterness. Root out all acidity, wormwood, acid, gall, and poison. By the blood of Jesus, repeat after me, "Father, I ask you to forgive me for my bitterness toward my family..." In the name of Jesus, I break the curse and set my brother free. You give him a new attitude of grace and hope and love and mercy.

Unforgiveness

Father, in the name of Jesus I come against the root of unforgiveness in this person's life. I come against the thoughts that never go away, that keep on remembering the past as though it were the present. Father, I ask you to remove all resentment, anxiety, unforgiveness, and thoughts of hate. I ask in the name of Jesus that you remove this strong will from my friend and soften it. Let her come to a place of repentance. Let mercy flow into her that the love of God would so fill her that no room would remain for things that have bound and hurt her in the past.

11—HEALING AND WHOLENESS

James Wagner, author of An Adventure in Healing and Wholeness, says, “God’s plan for our health is bigger than just for what hurts.”¹²⁵ Indeed, God wants us not simply to be pain-free but to be truly whole (*shalom*). Wagner identifies five kinds of health:

1. Spiritual health
2. Physical health
3. Mental and emotional health
4. Relational health
5. Ultimate, resurrection health¹²⁶

* * * * *

In praying healing prayers over people, keep these ideas in mind:

- ✓ Prayer ministry is healing ministry.
- ✓ Healing ministry doesn’t need gifts. It just needs you to (1) love God, (2) love people, and (3) bring the two together in prayer.
- ✓ Dr. Larry Dossey, author of Healing Prayer, states, “I decided that not to employ prayer was the equivalent of deliberately withholding a potent drug or surgical procedure.”¹²⁷
- ✓ God is our primary physician, and all doctors are his junior partners.
- ✓ Lay on hands and pray.
- ✓ Anoint with oil, as it seems appropriate (Jas. 5:14).
- ✓ Don’t miss the healing power of confession (Jas. 5:16).
- ✓ Pray in faith, trusting God for his sufficient grace (Jas. 5:15).
- ✓ Note there are “gifts (plural) of healing,” so there are many varieties.
- ✓ Two vital ingredients for healing prayer: (1) obedience to Christ, and (2) compassion for others.

- ✓ Some physicians believe that 50% of all healing needed (though the physical illness may be real) is relational healing.
- ✓ Healing is Christ's work. Like communion, people aren't coming to us but to Christ.
- ✓ The issue isn't the quantity of our faith, but whom our faith is in.
- ✓ In every healing, someone has faith (though it may not be the person who is sick). So for healing ministry, we want people of faith.
- ✓ Because Jesus loved the whole person, he wanted to help each person become whole.
- ✓ Communion can be a useful part of healing prayer by putting people in a receptive and expectant mode.
- ✓ The New Testament pattern was that Jesus/the apostles helped people because they needed help, not because they had become Christians first.
- ✓ Healing and evangelism go together. Healing often opens a door for people who have seen the hand of Christ to listen to the voice of Christ.
- ✓

James Wagner offers a threefold purpose for the church's healing and wholeness ministry¹²⁸:

1. To help one another experience spiritual union with God through Jesus Christ.
2. To help one another maintain a harmonious balance in each person's total system (body, mind, spirit, relationships) day after day, week after week.
3. To help one another restore or repair the total system when imbalance, disease, or lack of harmony are evident.

12—FASTING AND PRAYER

At the outset, two cautions must be set forth. First, fasting is not a work that forces God to act. He is sovereign. We trust his will far beyond our own. Second, fasting is not a work that makes us super-Christians. It serves rather to humble us before God and people. We recognize our frailty, and it forces us to lean on Jesus.

Fasting can be done in a variety of ways, lengths, and for many reasons. Fasting can be from food, entertainment, sex, possessions, etc. Fasting should have the primary role of raising up in us what John Piper rightly calls A Hunger for God.¹²⁹

- Fasting must always center on God. That is always the primary goal of fasting.
- Fasting reminds us that the unseen is the ultimate reality.
- Fasting helps us keep balance in life by reminding us of essentials.
- Use hunger as a reminder to pray.
- Fasting reminds us we don't live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the Father's mouth. (Luke 4:4)
- The first three days create the most complaints from the body! From day four, hunger eases off.
- "Here there is no extortion, no magic attempt to force God's will. We merely look with confidence upon our heavenly Father and through our fasting say gently in our hearts: 'Father, without you I will die; come to my assistance, make haste to help me.'"¹³⁰
- If your health is questionable, check with your doctor before fasting.
- We can fast for:
 - spiritual breakthrough (see Elmer Towns, Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough)¹³¹
 - success in prayer
 - enduing with power
 - physical benefits (see Dan. 1:12-20)
 - spiritual insights (see Acts 9:9-19)
 - freedom from addiction (see Mt. 17:20-21)
 - solving problems (see Ezra 8:21-23)
 - winning people to Christ (see 1 Sam. 7:1-8)
 - breaking crippling fears and mental problems (see 1 Kings 19:2-18)
 - providing for the needy (see 1 Kings 17:12)
 - an influential testimony (see Luke 1:15)
 - protection from the evil one (see Esther 4:16)
 - intercession for those in need (see Matt. 17:14-21)

**A SIMPLE WAY TO LEAD A PERSON TO
FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR AND LORD**

[This is an adaptation of Bill Bright's "Four Spiritual Laws." If you draw this as shown, it visually affirms the spiritual truths.]

1. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

- *"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." (1 John 3:1)*
- When people were first created, they were in intimate relationship with God. God loves you very much and wants that love relationship with you.
- *Draw a triangle (God) and circle (people) next to each other.*

2. Sin broke that relationship with God.

- *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23)*
- Sin isn't just doing bad things; sin is choosing our way over God's. It is rebellion against God. That broke the love relationship and alienated us from God.
- *Draw triangle (God) on one side of a canyon and circle (people) on the other.*

3. Jesus made a way to restore that love relationship.

- *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)*
- For all history, people have tried to get back to God. We have tried doing good things or being religious, but that doesn't deal with the sin that has broken the relationship. So God did that by sending Jesus to die for our sins. He paid for them to set us free.
- *Draw a cross with the arms touching both sides of the canyon, showing how Jesus makes a bridge to God.*

4. You must make a choice to receive Jesus as Savior & Lord.

- *"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." (John 1:12)*
- If someone gives you a gift, it does you no good until you accept it. Will you receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord right now?
- Lead in a prayer like this, phrase by phrase: "Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner. I have rebelled against your love. Thank you that Jesus died to forgive my sins. I receive that forgiveness and believe that by grace I am your child. Amen."
- *Draw the triangle and circle close together again.*

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Preparation

- *Please see the Words for the Pastor.* I cannot emphasize enough the critical nature of the pastor's support. Without it, the ministry will lack validity before the congregation and invitations to the altar will lack passion.
- *Pray!* Prayerfully seek God about whom you should invite. This sacred ministry required people who are spiritually sensitive, able to keep confidences, and who love people.
- Write a letter of invitation (including dates so they can check schedules), telling them you will contact each in about a week for a response. This gives them time to pray. Tell them it is okay to decline if they don't feel called or if schedules don't work. This is only for committed intercessors.
- Generally, aim for a class in the 10-15 participants range. Smaller would be preferable to larger.
- Throughout, inform your congregation. On the first Sunday that training starts, bring them to the altar and lead the congregation as you pray over them to bless them.
- We had fun with an "Altar Prayer Ministry Tool Box." Each week, I bought some inexpensive item representing an aspect of ministry. (Your Dollar Store is a gold mine!) Use your imagination for "tools!" (For instance, I got plastic army men in a bag and gave two to each on the day we discussed warfare prayer. Two because we don't fight alone. On forgiveness, I got cheap yo-yos and told about how even when we ran from God, he wants to draw us back.)
- Really focus on building a good team spirit. Be a real encourager. Most people are nervous about undertaking this venture, so help them know we're all in the same boat. Do your part to make this a "safe place."
- Be vulnerable in your leadership. There is no need to pretend you know more than you do. We are fellow learners. Take God seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously!
- Provide a good room atmosphere that is inviting and warm. Get someone to help by preparing the altar and let others take turns to connect them.
- Make a point of inviting everyone into the conversation. If people are very quiet, gently ask what they think on a subject. Don't let loud people dominate.
- Be sure time is left at the end of class to actually *pray*. Here is where the tire meets the road. Nothing prepares people to pray like actually praying!
- Make a laminated prayer card with the names of all the team on it. Give one to each to mark their manual so they can pray for one another each day.

WORDS FOR THE PASTOR

- Pastor, you are a gift from God. You have been called from within the people of God to help lead the people of God. To that end, you have been ordained and charged by God and the church to equip God's people for ministry.
- It may be that you do not feel you are a prayer giant. Welcome to the club! The materials will help you through step by step. Come alongside your team as a fellow learner and watch God's Holy Spirit work.
- It may be altar prayer is not customary in your church and you will be breaking new ground. You are the key to educating the congregation as well as the team. *Teaching the congregation about lay ministry and intercessory ministry and teaching them to receive this ministry is essential.*
- Without a doubt, the altar prayer ministry in your church will be exponentially stronger if you are the one who both draws this team together and leads the class.
- Pastor, apart from your leadership, this will not work.
 - First, people will notice if you are not leading the charge and the congregation will not follow. If they sense you are suspicious of this ministry, they will be, too.
 - Second, when the pastor asks the key leaders needed for this ministry, it validates them as well as the ministry.
 - Third, if you are integrally involved, the team and the congregation will feel that prayer ministry is not just lip service, but as central as you proclaim.
 - Fourth, you will share the journey with your team and grow closer to these key leaders in your church.
 - Fifth, you will be of one heart with your team as you invite your congregation to come to the altar to pray. *You are the key to the congregation accepting both altar prayer ministry and lay prayer ministry.*
- Pray! Pray! Pray! Pray that God will direct your selection of the team. Pray that God's Holy Spirit will infuse every meeting. Pray for your church to be receptive.
- In the end, pray that what happens in the church as people pray and receive prayer will spread into the community like a wildfire of God's grace. Who knows what incredible things God may do as you and your team make yourselves available to him!

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Introductory Session

- Advance Preparation
 - Have name tags available if all don't know each other
 - Prepare the room with an altar area—perhaps a candle and cross on a small table. Do it simply so that you don't set the bar too high. You will be asking others to take a turn later.
 - Have index cards on hand for later use
- Welcome and opening prayer (10)
 - Don't teach—pray! Invite God to come, ask forgiveness for failing to be the church God empowers us to be, and claim God's promises.
 - Share from your heart how God has been at work in your life, and why altar prayer is important to you.
- Group team building
 - In large group, each person “introduce yourself” (20)
 - Three interesting facts about yourself
 - Where have you seen God at work through prayer to bring transformation?
 - In small groups (count off into fours), share (10):
 - Why did you agree to participate?
 - What impact would it make on your church and community if more felt equipped to pray?
 - Large group: share answers to last two questions (15)
- Large group introduction to material (15)
 - Look at Student Guide, and daily assignments. Hand out Tool Boxes. Explain that most days will require 20-30 minutes of time. Invest time to gain wisdom.
 - Stress the importance of class preparation.
 - Make sure each has a good, understandable Bible.
 - Tell them they will face challenge.
 - Give them a page with Reflection Questions to return next week.
- Get with a prayer partner (5)
 - Share what you are comfortable sharing
 - Pray with each other
- Give index cards: Answer, “What do you feel you need to be able to serve God as an effective altar prayer minister?” (5)
- Celebrate Holy Communion together. (10) If the pastor is not teaching the class, *ask your pastor to serve communion*, laying hands on each person's head and praying for each.
- Be available for people who might want to talk afterwards

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 1

- Ahead of time, ask someone to prepare the altar area, perhaps with candles or something important to them concerning prayer. (Let different ones do it each week.)
 - Use nametags as long as needed.
 - Keep people moving so they don't lock into the same small group each week. Learn from others.
 - Ahead of time, ask someone to offer the opening prayer as the class begins.
- Welcome and prayer (10)
 - Ask people to turn in their weekly reflection sheet. Remind them it is confidential. It is only so you can intercede for them more clearly.
 - Invite the person you asked ahead of time to open the class with prayer. Simple beats long-winded. Verbose prayers will intimidate some.
- Large group teaching (20)
 - Give feedback from the index cards last week (anonymously), "What do you feel you need to be an effective altar prayer minister?"
 - Cover the reason for the class/vision for the ministry
 - Ask, "Did God give you a word or insight on prayer this week?"
- Explain ultra-slow Bible reading. Talk through the theme verses (pages 10-12)—2 Cor. 1:10-11—and add *brief* insights from your reflection (15)
 - Invite others to share insights they gained
 - Ask for responses to the question on page 12—what gave you the most confidence?
- Small group discussion (15)
 - Share in groups about the questions on page 9—when others have encountered Christ and when you have
 - Talk in groups about expectations, fear and hopes for this class. Be prepared to share with the class
- Teaching (10)
 - From Eugene Peterson's Working the Angles, 35-40, explain the shift from Wellhausen (pre-history, prophets, prayer) to Mowinkel (prayer is formative)
- As a group, look through Practical Pg. # 1 and comment (10)
- Get in groups of three to share needs and pray over them (see space provided at end of chapter). (10)
 - Give out weekly feedback sheet.
 - End by placing a volunteer who has a need (or knows of a need) in the center. All offer sentence prayers.

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 2

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (10)
 - Share in threes what was the biggest “God moment” you had this week
 - Appointed person offers prayer
 - Give something for the tool box
- Teaching (10)
 - Mountain climbers going over treacherous territory will hold each other “on belay.” Explain that this is the same for this team. Hand each a carabiner to clip to their key chain during the training.
- Small group discussion—in threes or fours (15)
 - Consider the question on partnership (p. 26)
 - Discuss the commitments of the team covenant (not to be signed until the end of the course)
 - “What will make the altar prayer ministry team a sacred partnership?”
- Large group time (20)
 - Share how you have discovered the power of team
 - “As you looked through the Scripture passages on 27-28, what ones struck you as most powerful in terms of team ministry?”
- Break into two groups—Share: “What did you discover as your spiritual gifts from the small inventory in the back of the manual?” (15)
 - Were you surprised by the results or not?
 - How do others feel about your gifts? Affirming?
- As a group, look through Practical Pg. # 2 and comment (10)
- In threes/fours, share prayer needs, recording them in the space provided. (10)
 - Hand out feedback sheet.
- Join together in John Wesley’s Covenant Prayer (p. 35)

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 3

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Take up feedback sheets
 - Prepare them for an opportunity to pray with people at the altar this next week at church. (Create such opportunities as often as possible during this class.)
- Welcome and opening prayer (10)
 - What has God been teaching you during this time? Have you found an opportunity to pray with another?
 - Have appointed person pray
 - Give something for the tool box
- Small groups (15)
 - Share your personal story about how you came to faith in Christ
- Teaching (20)
 - Share the principle of praying from within as taught by Larry Jackson in Numbered with the Transgressors (moving from fixing to loving intercession)
 - Ignatius taught praying the Scriptures as though going through them with Christ
 - Teach Scripture praying (i.e. using Psalm 23)—turning the Bible words into prayers
- Small group (15)
 - Discuss the three questions on p. 49
- Large group (10)
 - Why is Jesus the perfect Intercessor in Hebrews (p. 46-7)?
 - How does it feel to know he is praying for you right now? (p. 45)
 - Hand out feedback sheets
- Teaching (10)
 - Teach through Practical Pg. # 3 about the Modified Vineyard Prayer Model
- Closing prayer (10)
 - In groups of three, pray for each other using the modified Vineyard Prayer model (plan before you pray, considering the following)
 - Note key issue and source of need
 - Key prayer strategy
 - Ask Holy Spirit's discernment and blessing
 - Consider a key Scripture
 - Pray with laying on of hands

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 4

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Bring some anointing oil for the concluding prayer time
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (20)
 - What was it like to pray with someone this week? What did you experience? Did you feel God's presence?
 - Critical factor: Did you mostly focus on "How did *I* feel?" or "What is *this person's* need?"
 - Have appointed person pray
 - Give something for the tool box
- Large group (15)
 - Have you ever responded to an altar call? What were the circumstances? Did someone pray with you or not? What did you experience?
 - Consider Practical Pg. # 4
 - How can you in your church setting help make people know they are welcome at the altar?
- Small groups (15)
 - Is there an area in your life where you need God to show himself strong? (p. 57)
 - Pray with each other over these concerns right now
- Teaching (15)
 - Give a brief recap of the sweeping overview of the altar in Scripture and post-biblical history (from text).
 - Note the three emerging trends in use of the altar (p. 62-3)
 - Hand out feedback form
- Small groups (5)
 - Note prayer requests in the space provided
- Take a field trip to your church's altar (20)
 - Anoint each with oil while others lay on hands and one of the team prays Holy Spirit anointing on the person

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 5

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (20)
 - Have someone share a testimony of a God encounter since the class began
 - Did you pray with someone this week? What happened? What did you learn? Where was God in that experience?
 - Have appointed person pray
 - Give something for the tool box
- Teaching (10)
 - Discuss things Moses learned in Exodus 17 and 18 about team ministry and lay ministry (p. 67-78)
- Small groups (20)
 - Reflect on your own gifts (p. 75) and whether they are being utilized in the body of Christ
 - Discuss the questions on p. 67 (Q # 1), p. 69 and the bottom of p. 70
- Teaching (15)
 - Role of the altar prayer minister (Practical Pg. # 5)
 - Discuss: “What challenges you most in there?”
- In small groups, pray over either real concerns or role play from p. 143-4 (15)
 - Share prayer concerns for the week and write them down in the space provided
- Concluding meditation (10)
 - Read John 15:1-8 aloud slowly and ask people to listen to God’s voice teaching them
 - End this time with, “In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 6

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (20)
 - Have someone share a testimony of a God encounter since the class began
 - Did you pray with someone this week? What happened? What did you learn? Where was God in that experience?
 - Have appointed person pray
- Large group (15)
 - Review Scripture praying
 - Collaborate together on names of God (p. 84)
 - Have each pray a brief prayer aloud (eyes open is fine!) praising God using one of his names
- Small group (15)
 - Review ultra-slow Scripture reading for all
 - Discuss truths from John 16:24 (p. 82)
- Teaching (20)
 - Peter Lord on Hearing God
 - Traps that keep us from hearing God (Ch. 3)
 - DeVerne Fromke's four stages in our relationship with God (Life's Ultimate Privilege, Day 2, p. 5)
 - Hand out feedback sheets
- Closing prayer time (20)
 - Share prayer needs in space provided
 - Together look through "Are you ready to pray?" (Practical Pg. # 6)
 - A few leaders pray over others, asking God for forgiveness, humility, and mercy

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 7

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (10)
 - In pairs, share: “What was the closest moment you had to God this week?”
 - “What was your greatest struggle?”
 - Have appointed person pray
- Experiencing the heart of forgiveness (30)
 - Use the forgiveness prayer experience from Stephen D. Bryant and Marjorie J. Thompson’s Companions in Christ: The Way of Forgiveness (Upper Room Books, 2002), p. 69-71
- Small groups (10)
 - “What did God teach you on forgiveness?” (p. 89)
- Teaching (20)
 - Rick Bonfim on “roots”—Practical Pg. # 7
- Small group (10)
 - “What root do you most see in yourself?”
 - Discuss ideas from Bonfim, questions that arise, and the biblical concept of discernment
 - “Which image most connects to you on p. 91—switchboard or pipeline?”
- Closing prayer time (10)
 - Give out feedback forms
 - Return index card filled out in the introductory session. “Do you want to add or change anything?” Return for leader to pray over
 - Someone lead in prayer for breaking of bonds that keep people captive, tying back to Bonfim’s roots

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 8

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Prepare a small bowl in which small papers can be burned near the class's end (matches, too!). Be sure they can burn up completely
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (10)
 - Have someone share a testimony of God at work through prayer in their lives/experience
 - Have appointed person pray
- Large group (10)
 - How familiar is the concept of spiritual warfare to you (p. 95)?
 - Teach on appropriating the victory Jesus has already won at the cross (see p. 98)
- Small group (15)
 - Discuss the scriptures and concepts in Practical Pg. # 8 on Spiritual Warfare. This will be new for many
 - Discuss a "foothold" or "beachhead" (Eph. 4:26-27)
 - You might indicate the difference between demon possession (internal) and oppression (external)
- Teaching (20)
 - Explain the key concept of victory and attack shown by Ed Silvoso (see p. 100-102). His book, That None Should Perish, gives a full explanation (Ch. 3)
 - Follow-up questions and discussion
- Small group (15)
 - Discuss the two questions on p. 99
 - What attacks can believers expect?
 - What spiritual weapons do believers have?
 - End it by talking about two keys:
 - Focus on Jesus, not the problem
 - Pray in authority (of Jesus)—appropriate his victory which has already been won (esp. in relation to bondage)—see Matt. 16:19; 18:18
 - Give out feedback forms
 - Write on a paper an area where you are facing attack and burn it. Display ashes showing God's victory
- Closing prayer experience (20)
 - Where are you facing Satan's attacks in your life?
 - Where are attacks coming against people you know?
 - Pray in authority over these people. Keep the focus on Jesus. Appropriate his victory. Be bold.

THEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 9

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (20)
 - Debrief on prayer opportunities people have had
 - Share ideas and questions that have emerged in the process of praying or studying
 - Have appointed person pray
- Large group (10)
 - Have a number of people offer prayers they wrote for their church (p. 108)
 - Have you had opportunities to pray beyond the walls of the church?
- Small group (15)
 - Consider the questions concerning Mary and Martha, emerging from Luke 10:38-42 (p. 105-106)
 - What is one step you can take to restore prayer to its place of priority in your church? (p. 107)
- Teaching (15)
 - Consider needs of will, mind, and emotion raised by Rick Bonfim (Practical Pg. # 9)
 - Talk about watching in prayer (see Dick Eastman's The Hour That Changes the World)
 - Hand out feedback sheets
- Closing prayer (30)
 - Lead a guided meditation on Mark 2:1-12, using Stephen D. Bryant, Janice T. Grana, and Marjorie Thompson's Companions in Christ, 94-96.
 - In threes, identify a person God is calling you to help carry and offer prayer for those people.

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 10

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (20)
 - Debrief on prayer opportunities people have had
 - Share ideas and questions that have emerged in the process of praying or studying
 - Have appointed person pray
- Large group(20)
 - Role-play prayers. You can use ideas from Practical Pg. # 4. Better still is to name one of those needs and see if someone knows a real person with that need (name optional), and actually pray for that person
 - Whenever a person prays, always seek out and affirm what they did well. Any suggestions can be phrased, “You could also consider...”
- Small group (10)
 - Talk about Dallas Willard’s six points and respond to the questions on p. 115
- Large group (20)
 - Discuss together concerning discernment, bringing in ideas from Rick Bonfim (Practical Pg. # 10)
 - Look at the Sample Prayers by Rick Bonfim and discuss together about what you can learn from them (p. 159)
 - Talk together about the ideas of “revelation” and “authority” (p. 119)
 - Hand out feedback sheets
- Closing prayer(20)
 - In fours, write down prayer requests in space given
 - Indicate (with or without names) people you know in difficult circumstances who are close to giving up (or already have). Intercede for these
 - No benediction, just leave quietly when done

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 11

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar and another prepare to pray.
 - Bring enough stationery, envelopes, and stamps for everyone so they can write prayer letters to mail
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (15)
 - Debrief on prayer opportunities people have had
 - Share ideas and questions that have emerged in the process of praying or studying
 - Have appointed person pray
- Large group (10)
 - Discuss together what comes to mind when they hear about healing. What caricatures? What events? Personal experiences?
- Small group (15)
 - How would you respond to the person who says, “Your prayer didn’t work!” (p. 126)
 - Talk about your insights into Matt. 7:7-8 (p. 127)
- Teaching (15)
 - Talk about “Healing and Wholeness,” using information from Practical Pg. # 11
 - Hand out feedback sheets
- Large group prayer (25)
 - Role-play prayers. You can use ideas from Practical Pg. # 4. Better still is to name one of those needs and see if someone knows a real person with that need (name optional), and actually pray for that person
 - Whenever a person prays, always seek out and affirm what they did well. Any suggestions can be phrased, “You could also consider...”
- End by giving each a sheet of paper and envelop. (10) Invite all to take time right then to write a prayer for someone close to them (not in this group) and then mail it to them.
 - Lay all the prayer letters on the altar and have someone offer a prayer of blessing over them to end the class

TEACHER'S GUIDE—Chapter 12

- Ahead of time, have someone prepare the altar (this time with towel and basin) and another prepare to pray.
 - You may choose to first have a meal or not
 - Bring a basin and pitcher. Have plenty of water for the basin but not so it would be close to overflowing when a foot is put in. Warm water is best!
 - Bring enough towels for all to have their own
 - Take up feedback sheets
- Welcome and opening prayer (10)
 - Offer a prayer of thanks for what God has done during this time together.
 - This is a free-flowing session of reflection, giving thanks to God, embracing team, and looking ahead
- Large group (10)
 - What has God been teaching you during this time?
- Small group (10)
 - What are your hopes and dreams to impact our church and community?
- Large group (20)
 - Gather together in the large group and share the hopes and dreams God is giving you
 - What ideas are there for the future? In the church? Beyond the church? How can you help people embrace this ministry? What practical ideas emerge?
- Summary talk (10)
 - Reflect again on the theme verses—2 Cor 1:10-11
- Closing prayer experience (30)
 - Have a footwashing service. Seat women who take turns washing feet while men stand behind to lay hands on and offer unison. One foot at a time, then put on towel. Dry. Then person with clean feet washes next. After all are done, do the same for the men.
 - Prayer: “We lay our hands on you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. May God equip you with every grace to serve him with joy. In serving others, may you find the gift of serving Jesus. Remember that you have been called not to be served but to serve, just as Jesus served and gave his life as a ransom for many. You are cleansed, called, equipped, and sent forth. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.”
 - Put shoes and socks back on, then gather in a circle. Pray the Spirit and authority of Jesus over all of them.

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