

The Power of Prayer

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Presbyterian and Reformed Ministries International 2006

Edited by Rev Dr James D Kearny 2019

www.dunamisNW.org



Dunamis Course #3

Welcome to Dunamis Course #3. These lessons follow the Dunamis Project #3, The Power of Prayer, a four-day immersive conference. These lessons cover a majority of the material from the Dunamis 3 Manual in abbreviated form. The purpose of the Course, as opposed to the Project, is to introduce the lessons and exercises more slowly and with less intensity. Think of a drip feed rather than a firehose.

These materials are designed to be taken by a group using both video and written lessons. I have abbreviated the teachings in order to allow time for the small group discussion and prayer exercises. The teachings should lead to an experience. This is particularly true for this Course where the prayer exercises will often lead to significant healing and freedom.

If you have any questions or find yourself getting into difficulty with the healing exercises, please contact me, James Kearny, jdkearny@gmail.com, or the PRMI office, prmi@prmi.org. These questions and difficulties could be the doorway to breakthroughs.

May God richly bless you as you are healed and are led to heal others.

Grace and peace,

Rev Dr James Kearny

On behalf of PRMI

Important Resources:

- Refer to the Facilitator’s Guide for specific instructions on leading this ministry in your congregation or small group. <https://sites.google.com/view/dunamisnw/leaders-resources?authuser=0>
- Refer to the Small Group Leader’s Guide for practical instructions on leading a small group. <https://sites.google.com/view/dunamisnw/leaders-resources?authuser=0>
- Refer to the “How to Pray During an Event” for guidance on praying during your Dunamis event. <https://sites.google.com/view/dunamisnw/leaders-resources?authuser=0>

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Jesus taught his disciples some pivotal principles about asking in prayer that still apply today. In particular he taught about:

- Asking in his name
- Asking together, in agreement
- Asking in faith

Through these ways of asking, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have authority today to advance his Kingdom and to do his work.

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Dunamis 3: The Power of Prayer.

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Introduction to the Course Prayer that Shapes the Future

Lesson # 1

The Dunamis Course #3 The Power of Prayer



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

Welcome to the third Dunamis Course, The Power of Prayer. In this course I invite you to go deeper into the great adventure of prayer that is centered in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

This course on prayer has been prepared for by the first two Dunamis courses.

Our first course, **Gateways to Empowered Ministry**, covered who is the Holy Spirit and how he works in us and upon us to advance the kingdom of God

Our second course, **In the Spirit's Power**, covered receiving gifts and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

These courses provided the foundation for this present course on prayer. To gain from this third course you do not have to have had the first two. However, they are helpful in understanding the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of prayer.

This third course in our Dunamis equipping series is focused on prayer, because:

- Prayer is the way the Holy Spirit grows us in intimacy with Jesus and the Father.
- Prayer is the most basic way that the Holy Spirit guides us and empowers us to work with God. From prayer flows out all other works.

The Role of Location in Prayer

Prayer is often connected to locations set apart by God and made holy. In the Bible there are many such places, such as the temple in Jerusalem and the place where Jacob dreamed of a ladder with angels going up and down.

Particular locations can become holy through encounters with God that happen in these places. You see this in scripture where Jesus was born in Bethlehem, or Golgatha where he was crucified, or the empty tomb, where he was raised.

This can also be true for you. You can find a place and through your habit of prayer, it can become sacred. It can become holy as you regularly seek God in this place, and you have encounters with God.

Going Deeper



PRMI, Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International, is headquartered on 24 acres of forest covered mountains in North Carolina called "The Community of the Cross." This location with its log house, mountain river, moss covered trails and expansive vistas, is the place where the leaders of this ministry have encountered Jesus Christ. It has been a special place of prayer, set apart for great adventures in cooperating with the Holy Spirit in doing the work of prayer.

This location itself is an answer to a long season of prayer prompted by a vision received in prayer by the executive director, Brad Long.



This can be anywhere. This could be a special chair in your back bedroom, the sanctuary of your church, your car on your morning commute, or a mountain that you regularly hike. Find your place and make it holy through your regular habit of prayer.

Going Deeper

I was in ministry for years before discovering the essential value of having people pray for my ministry. We will go over Intercession later in the course. Currently, I use Prayvine to engage those friends who have agreed to pray for me. This web based tool was designed to help people in the first world to pray for missionaries. It models social media in creating a forum for more give and take, shorter requests combined with easy response and feedback. For more information go to: www.prayvine.org

The Back Up of Intercessors

Teaching on prayer is not an academic exercise but a dynamic relationship between God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and his people.

As I am teaching the course and preparing the written materials there are people praying for me and for you. These materials were originally written by Brad Long and Mary Ellen Connors with people praying for them.

This intercession is necessary. Prayer in the name of Jesus Christ and led by the Holy Spirit is a dangerous business. It is subversive of the world's realities and an act of war to Satan's kingdom of deception. I urge you all to pray as you begin this course of study, for yourself, and especially for each other in your small group.

Dynamic Prayer Will Be the Focus of This Course

There are many types of prayer. There is no way we can cover all these different forms of prayer in ten short lessons.

We have thus been led to focus the course primarily on intercessory prayer, prayer which cooperates with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to build and shape the Kingdom of God on earth. This is prayer that shapes the future.

God has created us in his image, to exercise dominion and to be his co-workers. The prayer that we will be learning flows from both our nature and this dynamic relationship with God and enables us to fulfill our God-given destiny and calling.

This form of prayer has its power and effect because it flows from the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is the shaper of reality; God is the builder of his Kingdom. Dynamic prayer is an essential component of our participating in God's building work. In this sense dynamic Prayer is the Foundation of All Other Ministry

Intercessory or Dynamic prayer has the power and authority to build new realities—spiritual homes, safe neighborhoods, new churches, mission outreach, diverse expressions of the Kingdom of God—where before, none existed.

The Purpose and Approach of the Course

This course is the opportunity for you to go further in this great adventure of cooperating with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to accomplish their plans and purposes. **We learn to pray by praying! So, ask the Holy Spirit to come and in the name of Jesus Christ teach you to pray.**

Jesus as the Model of Dynamic Prayer

While the Holy Spirit is the teacher of this course, Jesus Christ provides us with a model of not only how to pray, but of how to teach on prayer.

"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." (Luke 11:1)

The disciples were so stirred by Jesus' example that they asked him to teach them how to pray. Jesus' approach of first modeling the work of prayer and then teaching as the disciples asked, reveals first the nature of prayer and second how we learn about it.

Jesus Prays as A Prelude to Action

There were times when Jesus was caught up in extraordinary communion with God the Father. Luke 6:12-13 provides just a glimpse of the inner life of prayer that Jesus experienced.

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. Luke 6:12.

There are hints here of deep intimacy with God the Father that are mystical and contemplative. However, this mystical communion between Jesus and the Father that took place in a realm beyond earth was not an end in itself; it was the prelude and wellspring of actions that shaped God's kingdom on earth. Immediately following Jesus' night on the mountain in prayer he moved in decisive action.

When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated, apostles...
Luke 6:13

This was a world-changing action that was based on getting guidance from the Father as to which men he was to choose. His choice included all who were needed to set in motion the Father's plans for bringing salvation to the human race. In the life of Jesus again and again prayer is the prelude to dynamic action.



Jesus Praying in the Garden.
El Greco

This dynamic of intensive prayer and communion with the Father is also the prelude to Jesus' greatest act—going to the cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus is in an agony of prayer.

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Luke 22:42-44.

In this case, after the prayer battle and surrender in the Garden, Jesus clothed with action the reality already conceived in prayer. He rose up from his prayer and obediently began his journey to Golgotha. A journey that completed the Father's redemption of the world. Announced by Jesus in his final words on the cross, *"It is finished."*

This work of redemption was birthed in prayer and clothed in action. Jesus is our model of how to advance the kingdom of God, through dynamic prayer that is followed by dynamic action.

Jesus Calls Us—His Disciples—Into This Same Work of Dynamic Prayer

Jesus calls us to pray in this way as well. Nowhere in Scripture does Jesus say, "You should pray." He assumes we will pray. Jesus tells us how, when, where and for whom to pray. He also tells us how not to pray.

The first is for intimacy with the Father.

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. John 17:20-21.

The second is for power for action

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. Matthew 21:22.

Our task is to *"Go and make disciples of all nations."* Matthew 28:20.

How can we accomplish such a task without prayer?

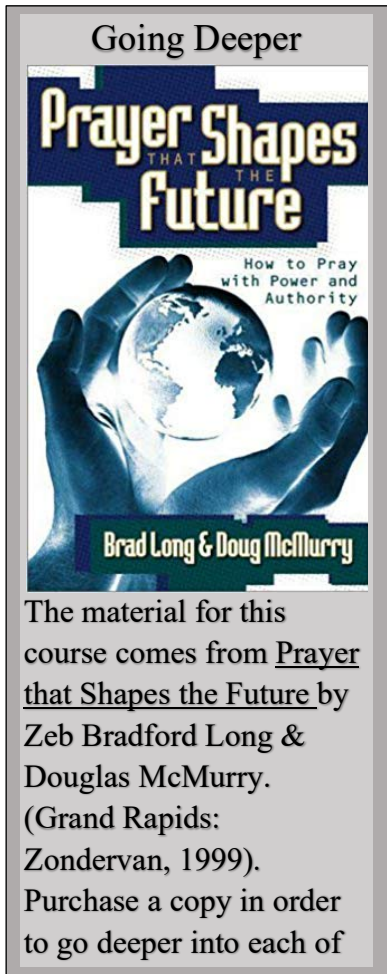
You might object, "How can I take the time to pray more? You don't know how busy I am already."

Personal story. I remember a time when I was preparing for a sermon series on prayer. In the middle of it, I sensed the Holy Spirit saying to me, "Why don't you pray?" I responded, "I'm busy. I really don't have the time to stop and pray." Then I received an invitation. I sensed the Lord saying, "Ok. Why don't you pray so much, you don't get your to-do list done. In fact, I invite you to try to out-pray me. I challenge you to pray so much that your to-do list doesn't get done. Didn't happen. In fact, I found just the opposite. The more I prayed, the more I got accomplished. I can't explain how this happened. I just observed my productivity going up as I invested more and more time in prayer.

I challenge you to do the same thing. As you go through this course, pray more. Don't just give God your to-do list. Begin with just being with the Father. Rest in him. Adore him. Then bring him your to-do list and receive guidance. See what happens.

Conclusion

In this course the Holy Spirit will be our teacher and Jesus will be our model. The subject will dynamic or intercessory prayer, prayer that shapes the future.



If you are feeling unworthy to join in this great adventure, do not worry. None of us is worthy. If you are feeling skeptical, I invite you to put on your scientist hat. Treat these lessons as principles which you can experiment with. Put them into practice and see what happens. Then share your results with your small group. I think you'll be surprised at what happens.

Small Group Questions and Exercise

The way we learn to pray is by praying. So after each lesson we will be moving into some simple prayer exercises that will help us practically experience the prayer principles offered in each lesson.

In this course we are all starting at many different places. Some may have much experience in prayer, others little. Some of you may be very free in praying out loud and others may have never had the experience.

Listening Prayer - Time with God Alone

As you reflect on the following questions, listen for God's answer and record in your prayer journal what you sense he's saying to you.

1. Reflect on and trace the growth of prayer in your life thus far. Try to identify a few special lessons that God has taught you then, that he does not want you to forget now.
2. Ask God to reveal the points in your life when he stretched your practice and understanding of prayer. List the lessons learned and the context of your life at those points (e.g. times in the wilderness, particular stress or blessing, etc.). What factors affected your openness to God's prayer lessons at those points?

Discussion Points - In Your Small Group

1. Share a story of a prayer experience you have had.
2. Have there been periods in your life when you have been challenged in new dimensions of prayer? What lesson did this experience teach you?

Prayer Exercise - In Pairs

Get into groups of two and pray for one another using the words right out of the Bible.

One at a time, pray the Lord's Prayer, but personalize it by inserting at appropriate points, the name of the person for whom you are praying.

'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done (in _____'s life) on earth as it is in heaven. Give (_____) this day (his or her) daily bread. And forgive (_____) (his or her) debts, as (he or she) also has forgiven (his or her) debtors. And do not lead (_____) into temptation, but deliver (_____) from evil. [For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.]' (Matt 6:9-13)

For the Week Ahead

Here are some suggestions for you to use in your times of seeking God this week:

- Pray for the person in your small group for whom you prayed the Lord's Prayer, Pray that he/she will cooperate with God in this work and adventure of prayer.
- Pray for opportunities to extend God's Kingdom, by witnessing to others about the power of God through prayer.

Ingredients of Prayer

Lesson # 2

The Dunamis Course #3 *The Power of Prayer*



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

While we have narrowed our topic in this to Dynamic or Intercessory Prayer, prayer that shapes the future, This particular prayer will often involve other forms of prayer. Adoration praise thanksgiving meditation confession petition as well as intercession.

In developing our life of dynamic prayer, we need to use all these forms of prayer as the basic building blocks, which like the syntax of a sentence, give coherence and form to our communication with God.

For example, in our human communication there are ways of beginning and ending out conversations. When we meet, we say, "Hello!" the other person responds with "Hi, how are you?" and so forth. There are accepted conventions such as listening while the other person is talking, responding to what the other person is saying. We usually begin with small talk and later decide whether to go deeper. Finally, we have ways of concluding the conversation. These conventions and forms assist in human communication.

There is a similar structure in our communication with God.

The different types of prayer help shape and focus our prayer. As we grow in prayer we find that the Holy Spirit will lead us in different combinations of these basic ingredients.

Adoration, Praise and Thanksgiving

A common way to begin our prayer is with adoration, praise and thanksgiving.

- We **adore** God for who he **is**.
- We **praise** him for what he is **doing**.
- We **thank** him for what he has **done**.

"Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they exist and were created." Revelation 4:11.

Adoration, Praise and thanksgiving are for God, but they help us as well. Have you ever begun your prayers discouraged by all the impossibilities of your life or the work that God has called you to? As you move into praise and thanksgiving, you shift your focus away from you and your impossible situation to God in whom all things are possible.

At a time of national calamity, the prophet Habakkuk kept praising God and this praise became his source of strength and life.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. Habakkuk 3:17-19.

Praise also welcomes God to show his presence. As the Psalm says,

"Yet thou art holy, you inhabit the praises of Israel." Psalm 22:3.

So, we begin with prayers of adoration praise and thanksgiving.

Confession and Forgiveness

As we draw near to God, the light of his goodness and holiness exposes our sinfulness. This awareness drives us to confession and repentance.



"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.'

"And the foundation of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'" Isaiah 6:1-5.

The mystery of the holiness and majesty of God overwhelmed Isaiah the prophet leading him to confess not just his sin, but the sin of his people as well.

But Isaiah did not stay in confession. . One of the seraphs cleansed his lips with a coal from the altar. Likewise, we do not stay in regret. Because of the

shed blood of Jesus Christ, we are able to confess our sin and be forgiven and restored to holiness.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I John 1:9.

We can confess our sins alone or even better with a trusted friend.

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." James 5:16.

As you begin this journey of prayer, I urge pray that God will give you a true friend who can open up your heart, confess your sin, receive the gift of forgiveness and be restored to holiness.

Meditation

Meditate, to think deeply and continuously; reflect; ponder; muse. Meditation is a type of prayer that shapes the mind and the heart. The psalms urge us to meditate upon certain aspects of God.

1. Upon the law of God

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." Psalm 1:1-2.

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2. Upon the precepts and ways of God

"I meditate upon thy precepts and fix my eyes upon thy ways." Psalm 119:15.

3. Upon what God has done and is doing

"I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; yea, I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate on all thy work, and muse on thy mighty deeds." Psalm 77: 11-12, see also Psalm 143.5.

4. Upon God and who he is

"My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips, when I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night; for thou has been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy." Psalm 63:5-7.

Richard Foster defines meditative prayer as follows:

"In meditative prayer we are growing into what Thomas a Kempis called 'a familiar friendship with Jesus.' We are sinking down into the light and life of Christ and becoming comfortable in that posture. The perpetual presence of the Lord (omnipresence, as we say) moves from a theological dogma into a radiant reality. 'He walks with me and he talks with me' ceases to be pious jargon and instead becomes a straightforward description of daily life."

5. The Word of God for Meditation

There is a wonder in simply coming into the presence of God and meditating on him. The safest way of mediating on God is to start with his Word, the Bible. The Word when enlivened to our hearts by the Holy Spirit will be the gateway into God's heart and into the reality of God's Kingdom.

The Word will serve as our anchor. Meditating on the Bible grounds our thoughts and imagination upon the truth.

Meditation is a form of deep listening which engages both our reason and our imagination. It is a listening to the story of scripture and then letting the Holy Spirit invite us into being a part of the story itself. Meditation.

Listening - Silent Entering into the Presence

"Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him" Psalm 37.7.

As we draw close to God, there often comes a time when all images and words fade away. When we rest in his presence, a resting which is intimate communion.

There are two paths "into the Presence":

1. Contemplation of Transcendence

The first path is into the dwelling place with God. A country that belongs so totally to God that no human words or images can ever adequately describe it.

¹ Richard J. Foster, *Meditative Prayer* (Madison, WI: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), p. 8.

Ezekiel, who in a mystic vision entered into God's dwelling place and beheld his glory, used symbols of wheels within wheels and brilliant precious stones to describe what he saw. Ezekiel 1:28.

2. Contemplation of Immanence

The second path into the Presence takes us into the contemplation of immanence. Here, God, in a warm embrace, opens his heart so that we may know and experience his love.

We may be caught up into the reality of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, *'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with them.'*" John 14:23.

To "make a home" calls up all the reality of a happy family in which there is love, closeness and intimate communication. This is a knowing of intimacy, an immanence, that is actual and lived.

The prayer of silent listening of contemplation.

In the Silence of God's Presence God Speaks

In the midst of this time of stillness, God may speak to us. After Ezekiel's vision of God's glory, he heard, *"Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak with you."* Ezekiel 2:1. Then God reveals the words that Ezekiel is to speak to the people of Israel.

Likewise, for us, after the silence, God may speak. his written words in Scripture may come to life for us and be seared in our hearts. He may also speak in the language of vision or in a still, small voice that penetrates to the depth of our being, affirming us as his chosen ones and giving directions as to what we should do. Or he may just whisper words of love that heal our brokenness and restore our souls.

The end of this silence is not emptiness, nor the absorption of the individual human being into the vast ocean of the Godhead; rather, it is communion and communication. It is a human being with God, fully and totally human while God is wonderfully, totally God. This is the essence of Christian prayer.

A Listening Exercise

Often when I am in these moments of stillness, I will ask the question, "Lord, what have you been trying to say to me?" I will record what I hear in my journal. I will also ask follow up questions, like, "Could you say a little bit more about that?" or "Is there anything specific about this?" "What else would you like to say to me?" I receive direction, answers to questions I'm facing, words of encouragement.

Petition

We come to our heavenly Father and make our requests known.

"Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Philippians 4:6.

There is a phase in prayer where we simply come to the Lord as dependent little children with all of our requests. We come with the confidence that he hears and will answer when we offer them up to him.

(We shall have a whole section of asking in the name of Jesus Christ. There is great power in this prayer.)

Intercession

In intercessory prayer we move past our own petitions into lifting up prayers for others. We join Jesus in standing in the gap for those in whom the Holy Spirit is at work.

“Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the son...” John 14:13.

We are standing with Jesus at the right hand of the Father interceding for others, making requests for others. (We shall spend much more time on the role of intercession, later in the course.)

Conclude with Thanksgiving and Praise

We always return to a time of thanksgiving and praise. This may be sung or spoken.

Developing One's Time and Form of Prayer

As led by the Holy Spirit, these basic ingredients can be used to structure your own personal prayer time, or they may be used to guide corporate prayer.

Seeking Your Own Pattern

This pattern is not a formula. Learn the parts and develop your own language of prayer that is consistent with your personality and the way the Holy Spirit may be working with you.

While all Christians have the blood-bought privilege of coming to God in prayer, the Holy Spirit may gift and call some to specialize in prayer ministry. For instance, some may have a special calling and empowering for intercessory prayer. Others may be led deep into contemplative prayer.

Personal Commitment

I encourage you to make a commitment to a regular time of prayer.

At the end of the day, praying is not a matter of feeling like praying or spontaneously just doing it, rather prayer is an act of will.

Prayer is part of our following Jesus Christ. Sticking to a regular time of prayer, even amid distractions and enemy diversions, you will be amazed at how often you will begin to pray spontaneously throughout the day and night. You will even begin to be surprised that you can, through the Holy Spirit, “pray without ceasing.”

Conclusion

While our focus in this course is intercessory or dynamic prayer, we will employ every form of prayer in this endeavor. Adoration, Praise, Thanksgiving, Confession, Meditation, Listening, Contemplation, Petition, as we learn the great work of intercession, prayer that shapes the future. This takes time. This takes a personal commitment. In the end, this will lead us deeper into the heart of God and into the personal adventure he has for each of us.

Practical Exercises for Prayer and Discussion

Listening Prayer - Time with God Alone

Choose one of the following questions, related to your need for a close spiritual friend. Reflect on the question, listen for God's answer and record it in your prayer journal.

If you don't already have such a relationship, ask God to reveal any blocks within you to pursuing that sort of soul friendship and accountability. Confess any reluctance or rebellion related to this. Ask God to show you one or more people in your circle of friends who might become a soul friend. Pray that your heart is open and ready to be that sort of friend to someone else. Pray also around the practical issues of time and availability.

If you do have such a relationship, thank God for that person. Ask God to reveal the health of that relationship and any specific ways you could bless or encourage your soul friend.

Discussion Points - In your small group

1. Name the eight ingredients of prayer outlined in this lesson.
2. Which of the ingredients of prayer do you use most frequently in your times of personal prayer?
3. Identify one ingredient that you find essential in your prayer times. What makes that ingredient important to you?
4. In an informal prayer setting, how do you know when it's time to move to the next element?
5. In your experience, how important is it that the ingredients of prayer happen in the order outlined in this lesson?
6. Share any experiences you may have had with Christian meditation and contemplative prayer.
7. What relationship do these ingredients have to corporate worship? How could you apply your new or refreshed understanding of the ingredients of prayer to your corporate worship experiences?

Prayer Exercise

Open your Bible and turn to John 15:5. Read that verse. Take several minutes to meditate on the verse – think about what it tells you about God, about his ways and what he desires. After a few moments, the facilitator will direct you to move into pairs. Share with each other what God showed you as meditated.

For the Week Ahead

Here are some suggestions for you to use in your times of seeking God this week:

- Choose one ingredient of prayer with which you've had less experience, and include that ingredient in your personal prayer times this coming week.
- Consider how you could be more intentional about prayer, and commit to doing that through this week.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Prayer

Lesson # 3

The Dunamis Course #3 The Power of Prayer



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

Have ever wondered what to pray? Have you ever struggled with even wanting to pray? This is when the Holy Spirit comes to help. For you see like, all other areas of our life with God, prayer is not all up to us and our efforts. It's a partnership between us and God.

The apostle Paul puts it this way.

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Romans 8:26-27, RSV.

With this in mind, let's explore how the Holy Spirit helps us intercede.

The Holy Spirit Gives Us The Desire To Pray

It is the Holy Spirit who stirs up in us the desire for prayer in the first place.

"For it is God who in us wills and to do his good will." Phil. 2:13.

Many times our hearts may be cold or just overwhelmed by the impossibility of prayer. While we may be led by a general awareness of need, or be driven by the fact that we ought to pray, our actual desire for communion with God is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

I often feel spiritually dry or I'm angry or busy. It's in these times when I most need to pray that the Holy Spirit gently prompts me to prayer. When this happens, I have the freedom to quench these stirrings of desire for prayer, or to welcome them. This is our part.

The Holy Spirit Enables Us to Pray with Passion

The Holy Spirit moves us beyond a prompt to pray into passionate prayer. Great prayer that prevails is prayer that is offered with passion.

"So, Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church." Acts 12:5.

The people at the church loved Peter. This was used by the Holy Spirit to start the fire of earnest and passionate prayer. Our love for someone or commitment to some cause will be used by the Holy Spirit to ignite these passionate prayers. This passion and urgency in prayer is not something that can be worked up or contrived. It comes from the Holy Spirit. This belongs to the empowering operation of the Holy Spirit, in which the Holy Spirit falls upon a person or a group, giving special power to do some special work. In this case, it is the work of prayer.

So, in your prayers, offer your loves to God as the kindling for the bonfire of passionate prayer.

The Holy Spirit Teaches Us How to Pray

If we want to learn how to pray, the Holy Spirit stands ready, willing, and able to teach.

Jesus defines the role of the Spirit like this.

"He [the Holy Spirit] will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." John 16:14-15.

The Holy Spirit teaches us by calling us to remember the teaching of Jesus. He brings to our minds and seals upon our hearts the appropriate words of Scripture.

He will also show us what to pray for and how to pray.

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for ...” Romans 8:26.

Often, as I have faced situations in which I truly did not know how to pray, I have invited the Holy Spirit just to come and show me how to pray, and then waited. He has indeed taught me and given just the right approach.

Personal Example

This happened for me, just last night. I awoke in the middle of the night after a disturbing dream. My mind was swirling with all kinds of thoughts and worries. I turned over and tried to go back to sleep but sleep didn't come. I remembered this lesson and asked, “God, what is going on?” I heard, “This is a spiritual attack.” I replied, “What should I do?” I heard, “Pray against the attack. Claim the victory you have in Christ.” So, I did this for a while. After some time, I felt something shift and peace returned. I said, “What was that?” I heard, “That did it. You won. Go back to sleep.” I turned over and immediately fell back into sleep.

What do we make of this? Remember the four discernment guidelines.

1. Did it bring glory to Jesus? Yes, it claimed Jesus' victory over the devil and his schemes.
2. Was the guidance consistent with scripture? Yes, we are not unaware of the devil's schemes. He is a roaring lion seeking to devour us. And yes, Jesus defeated him on the cross.
3. Did other Spirit filled Christians agree? I checked with my videographer this morning, who is Spirit-filled, and he agrees.
4. Were their verifiable objective facts that confirmed the guidance? The guidance was confirmed by my feelings and by my being able to go back to sleep. And since I believe the attack was designed to disturb my sleep, the counter-attack of prayer was successful. I went back to sleep.

The Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray.

Through the Gifts the Holy Spirit Directs Our Prayer

God may use the gifts of the Spirit to speak or reveal to us what we need to know in order to pray. Here we are building on what we learned in Dunamis 2, in the Spirit's power, where we learned about spiritual gifts. These are listed in I Corinthians 12:7-10:

- The word of wisdom
- The word of knowledge
- Prophecy
- Gift of tongues and interpretation

These gifts are often expressed in a group or with a prayer partner.

We can be praying about an issue and someone sees an image or a prophetic message. The same is true when someone receives a word of wisdom or knowledge, or even a message in tongues as long as there is an interpretation. The group then discusses what was revealed and then decides

how it directs them to pray. The interpretation gives specifics on how to pray into the problem at hand.

I often practiced this when I moderated my session or elder board. When we would discuss an issue, we would often stop and listen to the Holy Spirit for just such guidance, a prophetic word or a word of knowledge or wisdom. I even received a message in tongues which when interpreted gave us direction.

The Holy Spirit will often give us guidance on how to pray through the Spiritual gifts.

Pray In the Spirit

Paul commands us to: "*Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.*" Ephesians 6:18.

How do we do that?

In Tongues

I believe praying in the Spirit and praying with the Holy Spirit both refer to praying in a prayer language, that is in tongues.

In I Corinthians 14, Paul specifically uses the term praying with the Spirit to refer to the gift of tongues. “. *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays*

Tongues is a way of constantly expressing the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. For those who have received the gift of tongues, it is possible to almost continually be praying in tongues throughout the day.

Tongues is one way that this melody of the indwelling Spirit may find expression.

With our Mind

You might be thinking, well, I don't speak I'm tongues so I cannot pray in the Spirit. "Praying in the Spirit" does not require the gift of tongues. Praying in the Spirit is allowing the Holy Spirit to pray in us and through us. This requires that our minds are in tune with the Holy Spirit. For this to happen we must do the following basic steps of discipleship:

1. Surrender our wills and ourselves absolutely and unreservedly to God.
2. Obey God in every department of our lives. Disobedience at any point of our life grieves the Holy Spirit and makes it impossible for Him to move through our prayers. Just as our disobedience frustrates the Holy Spirit in moving through any other part of our life." (Acts 5:32—"...the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.")
3. Keep in mind our own utter inability to pray aright, and our entire dependence upon the Holy Spirit.
4. Ask God to guide us by His Holy Spirit as we pray.
5. Count upon God's answering our prayer to send the Holy Spirit to teach us to pray;..." Romans 8:26-27.
6. Study the Word of God daily and earnestly.

*RA Torrey wrote: "We must never lose sight of the tremendously important fact that the invisible Spirit of God does His work though the visible written Word of God. **If** we keep ourselves in harmony with the mind of God by a constant daily study of the Word of God, and by scrupulous obedience to the Word of God, the instrument through which the Holy Spirit*

*constantly works, then the Holy Spirit will guide us in our prayers; and only then...prevailing prayer always goes hand in hand with persistent and obedient study of the Word of God."*²

Pray in the Spirit. Let the Spirit pray in you and through you, in tongues or with your mind.

The Need To Be Filled With The Holy Spirit For Empowered Prayer

Do you see how this practice of allowing the Holy Spirit pray through us connects with Dunamis courses 1 & 2?

- Dunamis 1 taught us how to ask for and receive the Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

We need the infilling with the Holy Spirit in both the inward work and the outward empowering work, if we are to fully enter into this work of prayer.

- Dunamis 2 taught how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in doing the work of Jesus Christ, how to receive guidance and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This guidance and these gifts give us concrete direction and information in our prayers

Paul summed up following Jesus as walking with the Spirit. Galatians 5:16. *"Keep in step with the Spirit."*

To keep in step with the Spirit requires the Spirit to have all of us, not just part. **We Need To Be Filled With The Holy Spirit For empowered prayers. This empowers us with prevailing, powerful prayer, prayer that shapes the future.**

Conclusion

For our prayers, the wonderful promise of the Holy Spirit is that he not only prompts us to pray He also helps us to pray. He ignites our love into passionate prayer, giving us guidance and directing us how to pray through spiritual gifts. In this powerful and effective prayer, we will not only be growing in intimacy with Jesus Christ, we will be aligned with the will of the Father in shaping the future. All for God's glory.

² R. A. Torrey, *The Power of Prayer and the Prayer of Power*. pp. 141-145.

Practical Exercises for Prayer and Discussion

Listening Prayer - Time with God Alone

Reflect on one of the following questions, listen for God's answer and record it in your prayer journal.

- Talk to God about your prayer life, and listen to his heart on where he wants to take you in that adventure.
- God about the role that being baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit plays in your praying effectively. If you have not prayed for the baptism in the Holy Spirit, pray and ask God now for that. 3

Discussion Points - In your small group

1. Look over the list of practical ways in which the Holy Spirit enables us to pray.

Share an experience in which the Holy Spirit has enabled you, through one of those ways, to pray.

2. Share a time when The Holy Spirit has shown you what to pray for and how to pray.
3. Discuss what it means to 'pray in the Spirit. If you do not pray in tongues, share how it is that you 'pray in the Spirit'.
4. Discuss Brad's statement that 'Christian prayer, while involving us in all the dimensions of our humanity, is really not our praying but Jesus praying through and with us.' Do you agree? Have you experienced this to be the case? If so, how?
5. Review and discuss the answers this lesson offers to the question of why we need the Holy Spirit to pray for us, if Jesus is already interceding for us at the right hand of God.
6. Have you ever had an experience of prayer clearly guided by the Holy Spirit?

How can you attune yourself to the Holy Spirit to have such experiences more frequently? Do you ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in prayer and believe that he can do so?

If you have not taken the earlier Dunamis courses (Gateways to Empowered Ministry & In the Spirit's Power) which give deeper teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speak to your video course leaders for more resources and clarification about baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Prayer Exercise

Move into groups of three. If possible, join people that you don't know very well. Pick one of the people in your group for whom you will pray. That person should not share a specific prayer request, simply that they would like prayer. Move into a time a prayer for that person, beginning with a time of silence. Ask God how to pray for the person.

There are many ways to hear from God. He may speak through a Scripture passage. Sometimes a single word or a picture will come to mind or even a song. Use these things to guide your prayer. This is a time to experiment. When you are done praying, take some time to check in with the person you prayed for. Did the prayers seem on track? Did they make sense to the person? This is one of the ways we learn to pray and to test how well we are hearing the Holy Spirit's guidance.

There are always people in the group who “don’t get anything”. There can be many reasons for this. Maybe you aren’t used to listening this way. Sometimes it takes practice to listen well. Perhaps, you are very tired or distracted by personal burdens. Perhaps God is simply not revealing anything to you at this particular time. If you don’t get specific direction in how to pray, you can always pray blessings and ask the Lord to move in that person’s life. That is a prayer God is always happy to answer!

For the week ahead

Here are some suggestions for you to use in your times of seeking God this week:

- Reflect on R.A. Torrey’s guidelines for praying in the Spirit. Ask God to highlight one or more of those that he’d like you to do more intentionally, and then put it/them into practice this week.
- Read and reflect on Appendix 1: How the Holy Spirit will Actually Speak to Us, Guiding Us in Prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to bring you guidance through these means. Pray also for discernment (as per the Four Guidelines for Discernment) as you weigh that which you sense the Holy Spirit has spoken to you.

Appendix 1: How The Holy Spirit Will Actually Speak To Us Guiding Us In Prayer

Let’s explore this from the experience of people in the Bible who actually received guidance from the Spirit of God. In these examples we will draw both from the Old and New Testament; this is justified because of the continuity of the outward working of the Holy Spirit through the Bible. See the Gateways to Empowered Ministry for the Biblical basis for this assumption.

A. Mental Images

This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD asked me, “What do you see, Amos?” “A plumb line,” I replied. Then the Lord said, “Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.” Amos 7:7-8.

The word of the LORD came to me: “What do you see, Jeremiah?” “I see the branch of an almond tree,” I replied. The LORD said to me, “You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.” The word of the LORD came to me again: “What do you see?” “I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north,” I answered. The LORD said to me, “From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land.” Jeremiah 1:11-14.

Words of knowledge and guidance from the Holy Spirit may come in the same way as a mental image or a picture. This is what Amos and Jeremiah are experiencing as they see mental images that reveal spiritual reality or the intentions of God.

B. Thoughts and Nudges

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to the land of Israel: The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land.” Ezekiel 7:1-2.

The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” Acts 8:29.

How did the Spirit tell Philip to do this? This could have been a nudge, a thought that came to him, or just an awareness that that is what he needed to do. The Spirit also could have whispered in his heart, “Go to that chariot and stay near it!”

Often the Holy Spirit will lead us in prayer through such whispered words or just a hunch or a nudge.

For instance when the PRMI ministry team was in China in 2005 providing equipping for Three Self and House Church leaders, we were detained by the police and interrogated for some 14 hours.

As this was taking place I was able to sneak in mobile phone calls back to intercessors in the United States and England. As these people called other intercessors they found that many had already been awakened by the Holy Spirit and told to pray for us in China.

The telephone call came as a confirmation of the nudge or whispered word of the Lord that they were to move into intercessory prayers for the China team. Some described this experience just as an urgent knowing that we were somehow in trouble and that they were pray.

I have no doubt that such Spirit-led prayer provided protection from harm as well as opened the door for us to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to face this difficult situation. Above all, this human and Holy Spirit orchestration of prayer resulted in our release and an effective witnessing to Jesus Christ.

As you grow in prayer and this art of listening to the Spirit you will more sensitive to these nudges and be able to sort out which ones are really from God and dismiss those that are from one’s own imagination.

When such guidance comes you need to take it very seriously as it may be the Holy Spirit’s invitation to share in his kingdom advancing work.

C. Words of Scripture

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 11:15-16

The Holy Spirit brought to Peter’s mind the word from Jesus that explained what had just happened to Cornelius and those gathered in his home.

God will often speak to us today in this way. A verse of scripture or a concept or a word will just “pop into your head” at the right time and place. The same will happen when we are praying for someone. A certain verse of scripture may just be remembered, and this serves as guidance of what to do or say or an insight into the workings of God.

This is a very common way the Spirit may lead our prayers.

D. Visions

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:9-10

A vision is a glimpse of reality as seen by God. It may also be a glimpse into what God is doing or intends to do. A vision is one of the primary ways that we are shown how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. These may be pictures or just knowing what God wants to do.

There is a close connection with visions and images that may be given as defined above.

There seem to be different kinds of visions in the Bible – some, like the one given to Paul of the man from Macedonia, were guidance given to direct a particular phase of the missionary outreach. A vision may also provide long term guidance of what it is God is calling you to pray into reality.

E. Dreams

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 1:20

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” Matthew 2:12-13

We find in the Bible that God often spoke to people in dreams, guiding them to know what to do. Examples abound of how a dream may provide the guidance of how to pray for someone in trouble

Each of us will need to learn how to listen to the Holy Spirit as he gives us guidance. We will also need to rigorously apply the four guidelines for discernment so that we are not deceived or led astray.

Four guidelines for discernment

1. Does it give glory to Jesus Christ in the present and the future? John 14:26, John 16:13-14
2. Is it consistent with the intentions and character of God as revealed in Scripture? John 2:22, II Timothy 3:14-1
3. Do other people who are born again and filled with the Holy Spirit have a confirming witness? I Corinthians 2:14-15, 14:29
4. Is there confirmation in objectively verifiable events or facts? Deuteronomy 18:21-22, Isaiah 55:10-11

The Power of Asking in the Name of Jesus Christ

Lesson # 4

The Dunamis Course #3 The Power of Prayer



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

Jesus taught his disciples some pivotal principles about asking in prayer that still apply today. In particular he taught about:

- Asking in his name
- Asking together, in agreement
- Asking in faith

Through these ways of asking, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have authority today to advance his Kingdom and to do his work.

I. Jesus' Promises about Asking in His Name.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it."
John 14:12-14.

Going Deeper

"There is no use in our trying to approach God in any other way than in the name of Jesus Christ, and on the ground of His claims upon God, and on the ground of His atoning death whereby He took our sins upon Himself and made it possible for us to approach God on the ground of His claims upon God. "While we have no claims upon God because of any goodness or service of our own, Jesus Christ, as we have said, has infinite claims upon God and has given us the right to approach God in His name, and we ought to go boldly to God and ask great things of God. **"...Do you realize that we honor the name of Christ by asking great things in that name? Do you realize that we dishonor that name by not daring to ask great things in that name? Oh, have faith in the power of Jesus' name and dare to ask great things in His name."** RA Torrey, [The Power of Prayer](#) pp. 109-110

What a promise! However, it's conditional upon believing in Jesus. Its purpose is to glorify the Father in the Son. Your answered prayers in Jesus' name bring glory to the Father. They make a real difference in our actual real world which can be seen by actual people.

For example, I met a member of my church at a coffee shop. We had not planned to meet. We just happened to bump into each other in this long line. She apologized for not having been in church for a long time. Turns out she was struggling with stage four colon cancer. So, I prayed for her healing, in line. I rebuked the cancer in Jesus' name. Next month I saw her at church again. She told me that her cancer was in remission. She told me of her Jewish doctor walking down the hallway of the hospital holding up her x-rays and declaring in a loud voice. "Praise Jesus!" He was not a believer in Jesus, however, he knew she was and that she had prayed for healing. He said, "Your tumors are shrinking, and I can tell you as a doctor, it was nothing I did. It's a miracle." This answered prayer made in Jesus' name gave glory to the Father through Jesus.

A. The Name of Jesus Is Not a Magical Formula

Acts 19 records the story of Jewish exorcists who, in imitation of Paul, tried to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over a person who had evil spirits. They used the name of Jesus as a magical incantation. They did not have a relationship with Jesus Christ and were not led by the Holy Spirit. The results were

revealing.

"Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.' Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." Acts 19:13-16.

When a child of God, rooted in a relationship with Jesus Christ, commands demons in the name of Jesus, they must obey. Demons recognize us as one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, and that we are acting in the authority of Jesus because of our relationship with him. They will be confronted with a unified front and will have no choice but to obey.

An example.

This happened to me the other day. I was praying for healing for a woman and after some healing of some inner issues, my partner and I decided to see if this woman was hosting any evil spirits. So in the name of Jesus we commanded the evil spirits to manifest, to show themselves and to give us their names. Sure enough they showed themselves, gave us their names. It took about 15-20 minutes of struggle, because they didn't want to leave. But when they did, the woman began breathing deeply. She said she felt light, that a big heavy weight, a big coat of rocks had come off of her. She said, "I feel free." That's what happens to us as children of God when we are dealing with demons. We will get into this more in Dunamis 5. For now, know that prayer in the name of Jesus is powerful.

B. We are ingrafted into Jesus

Jesus put it this way.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." John 15:3-8.

The power in asking in Jesus name comes from being in Jesus. This is a deep mystery. For in our baptism we are engrafted into Christ, just as a branch is engrafted to a vine or a tree. Paul also uses the image of being a part of the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12. Both are images of being organically connected to Jesus. To ask in Jesus' name is to recognize this intimate connection. We ask in Jesus name because, by our baptism, we are an actual part of Jesus. When we abide in him and ask in his name, we may ask and expect great things!

C. Seated with Jesus in Heavenly Realms

Paul writes "*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*" Colossians 3:1. "*and God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,*" Ephesians 2:6.

So, to be in Christ means we are somehow seated with him next to the Father in heaven. John saw a glimpse of this in a vision, "*I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A*

rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also, in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. ...Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center before the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Revelation 4:2-6, 5:6.

This is a long stretch of scripture, but I wanted you to see your position in Christ, the authority we wield when we invoke the name of Jesus. Paul is right to urge us to seek the things above. The Father is seated on the throne in heaven, surrounded by his court of elders, the four seraphim, and the glassy sea of his subjects. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is standing at the center before the throne. We are there with Jesus. What a position of authority! And at the same time, we are embedded in the circumstances of our lives on earth. While we have nothing in ourselves - no righteousness, no goodness, no reason at all - why God should give us an ear. Because of Jesus, we have a position of heavenly authority, we have the privilege of making requests to the Father concerning the issues that surround us. That's why we ask in the Name of Jesus.



II. Jesus' Promises—"If Two Agree and Ask ..."

Another fundamental principle of prayer: there is power in our prayer when we ask together, in agreement with one another. We are the body of Christ. The Kingdom is not me and Jesus, it's we and Jesus. *"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."* Matthew 18:19-20.

Together, and in the presence of Jesus Christ, we may better discern the will of God and pray according to his will. When we're knit together in a common purpose we can, with one heart, work this out.

Asking in agreement with others is acting more as the body of Christ. How often do we ask others to pray for us, believing, rightly, that these additional prayers help. More than just a greater amount of prayer, being in agreement with others demonstrates the unity of Christ's body that that God highly values.

The night before he died, Jesus prayed to the Father, *"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought*

to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved Me.” John 17:22-23

This prayer of agreement is unity in action and the world sees this.

What do these principles of asking in the name of Jesus Christ and asking in agreement look like in ordinary life?

An Example. My church in Seattle was in the red. We didn’t have our own property and our monthly rent for our offices, classrooms and worship space was killing us. I put together a “home team” to look for a new space. We were hoping to buy, but real estate in downtown Seattle was expensive. The team began their work by praying. I remember one meeting I attended, where the

Lord’s prayer shaped the entire meeting. They always prayed in Jesus’ name. They made specific requests—we want a place to worship, a place to fellowship, classrooms for Sunday school and offices for our staff. We would like parking for our members, we would like it fairly close to where we now rent. Within a couple of months, I had a local pastor ask me if he could show me his church building. It was 28,000 sq ft. had a beautiful sanctuary, huge fellowship hall, commercial kitchen, offices,



classrooms, parking. It was run down, cluttered and rather dirty, but had good bones. His congregation was down to 15 in worship. They had a building and not many people. We had people but no building. Long story short, we ended both churches, came together and started a new work. Not only was the entire property and improvements free, they had leased the parking lot during the week which brought in \$100,000 a year. The facility needed a lot of TLC. The surrounding neighborhood was a big challenge, but our prayers in agreement were answered miraculously.

III. Jesus’ Promise—Ask in Faith

Jesus taught the importance of praying with faith. *“I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” Matthew 21:21-22.*

A. The Relationship Between Faith and God’s Activity in The World

God does seem to act in accord with the largeness or smallness of our trust (faith) in what he can do. It is done according to your faith.

"As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you"; and their sight was restored." Matthew 9:27-30.

To those who trust Jesus, he is able to do great things. To those with no trust, or who discount Jesus all together, he is able to do little. By his sovereignty in the affairs of human beings, God has chosen to make faith the means by which he works in the human sphere.

In his own hometown Jesus was able to do little because of their lack of faith. (Matthew 13:57-58)

What then is faith? It's trust that Jesus will do what he says he will do. And as we see answers to prayer, it deepens our faith and above all, our relationship with Jesus Christ.

You might say, how do I get this faith? I'm a better skeptic than I am a believer. What if I don't feel that God will catch me if I take a risk in faith? Do not worry. Faith doesn't depend upon the one taking the risk. It depends upon the one we are trusting. For example, imagine a lake frozen in winter. A friend invites you to go walk out on the ice. If you take the risk and go out onto the ice, your safety doesn't depend upon your confidence in the ice holding you up. It depends upon the thickness of the ice. All you need is enough faith to take a step. Then, if the ice holds you, you might take another step. The more you walk, without the ice breaking, the more confident you become. It's the same as taking a risk and trusting the promises of God. All you need is enough faith to take a little baby step, the faith the size of a mustard seed. As God supports your faith, your seed of faith will grow.

Conclusion

In summary, when these three promises of Jesus come together

- asking in Jesus' name,
- asking in agreement,
- asking in faith, then we have vast authority. We may ask great things of God!

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IV. PRACTICAL EXERCISES FOR PRAYER AND DISCUSSION

Listening Prayer - Time with God alone

Consider the three aspects of asking (In Jesus' name, in agreement, and in faith) which this lesson highlights. Choose one to focus on and discuss with God in your listening time. Record in your prayer journal what you sense God's saying to you.

- Ask God to bring to mind attitudes or experiences which may hinder your prayers, as it relates to the way in which you ask God. Respond with confession or forgiveness as it seems appropriate or needed. Listen for God's gentle voice of correction and/or encouragement as you grow in the adventure of asking God in prayer. Record how you sense he is calling you to proceed. Be sure to apply discernment to that which you sense God's saying to you.

Discussion Points - In your small group

1. Tell about a time when you experienced the power of praying in the name of Jesus. How did that differ from adding a perfunctory "in Jesus' name" to the end of a more typical prayer?
2. Describe your experiences of corporate prayer – praying together. How has that experience differed from your individual prayer times, in terms of the power of those prayers?
3. What's the difference between praying together with others (corporate prayer) and the prayer of agreement?
4. Discuss the difference between saving faith and mountain moving faith. If you have a story of mountain moving faith, share it.
5. Discuss the relationship between faith and God's activity in the world. Have you seen God's power limited by lack of faith? If so, share that experience.

Prayer Exercise

Move into groups of three. Within your group, take turns presenting a prayer request. As each request is presented, the others join in praying for that request. If you need more faith to pray, ask God for it. When possible, agree with the prayers of others, but only when you honestly agree. Ask all things in the name of Jesus, relying on his promises and his relationship with the Father.

Ask in agreement, ask in faith and ask in the name of Jesus.

Here are some suggestions for you to use in your times of seeking God this week:

- Record in your journal the prayers you pray this week, the way in which you asked those prayers, and any answers that come.
- If your church holds a prayer meeting (separate from Sunday morning worship), join that group (at least once) and experience asking God together.

V. APPENDIX: ESTABLISHING THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR PRAYING IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

A. Jesus Performed Mighty Works Because Of Three Facts

1. He was born of the Holy Spirit through the Virgin Mary. He was the Son of God. (Luke 1:35)
2. He had the Holy Spirit upon him for power. (John 1:32-34)
3. This power and authority was subordinated to and directed by the Father. (John 5:19)

The way that we are to be the means through whom Jesus works in the world today is according to the same principles.

1. We are born again by the Holy Spirit as children of God. (John 3:5)
2. We have the Holy Spirit upon us for empowerment. (Acts 1:8, 2:38-39)
3. We are subordinate to the Father through Jesus Christ and are led by the Holy Spirit. (John 15:1-11, 16)

These verses about asking in the name of Jesus, speak to this third principle of relationship and subordination. It also makes it clear that the way we shall do the works of Jesus is, above all, through prayer.

B. What Does It Mean To Pray In The Name Of Jesus Christ?

To answer this question, the story of the crippled man healed through Peter at the Gate Beautiful gives us some important insights.

"But Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'" (Acts 3:6)

It is perfectly clear that in Peter there was no supernatural power to heal the sick.

Rather the power and the authority all flowed from Jesus Christ. The means of expressing that power was through the disciples' relationship with Jesus and faith in him. They were acting as led by the Holy Spirit, and the rest was God's work.

It is this acting on the basis of the relationship that is the meaning of asking or praying something in the name of Jesus.

When we ask or act according to the name of Jesus, we find there is the awesome power and authority of the One to whom has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. This power is in accord with the nature of the One with whom we have the relationship.

Each time we find reference to the name of Jesus, whatever is accomplished is consistent with the character and work of Jesus. A few of examples:

There flows from Jesus salvation and eternal life.

"And there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God;" (John 1:12)

"...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

In each of these examples the things that are done in the name of Jesus Christ are in perfect accord with who he is and what he did while in the flesh. In each we see that the way we may continue to do the works that Jesus did is through a relationship with him and in praying and acting in accord with who he is.

How God Answers Prayer

Lesson # 5

The Dunamis Course #3 *The Power of Prayer*



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

The next two lessons are a kind of mini-series in the midst of this larger series in prayer. In these next two lessons we will be looking at the phenomenon of when God answers prayer and when he seems not to answer prayer. Both seasons have their purposes. Both shape us in particular ways.

Let's begin with the phenomenon of God answering prayer.

The witness of Scripture, the history of the Church, and personal experience, all testify that God answers our prayers. But:

- “Why does God answer prayer?”
- “How does God answer prayer?”

These will be our subjects for today.

I. Why does God answer Prayer?

Why would the all-powerful, all knowing Supreme Being, creator of all things bother to answer our prayers? Jesus said to his disciples:

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” John 15:7-8.

1. So that we may bear much fruit.

God answers our prayers in part because, by His sovereignty, we are the primary means on earth through whom He has chosen to accomplish His purposes. This includes, in addition to our own salvation, the redemption of the human race and the restoration of all things.

Fruit bearing is also consistent with the original command that God gave our first parents. We are called to be fruitful, to multiply, to responsibly till the garden and to exercise dominion over the earth. Genesis 1:28-31, 2:15.

Prayer is a huge part of how God partners with us to accomplish his commands to exercise dominion, to make disciples, to restore God's creation. To bear much fruit.

2. To Prove that we are Jesus' Disciples

In Our scripture earlier Jesus said that by bearing fruit we would be “*showing yourselves to be my disciples.*”

Answered prayer is evidence of the truth of the gospel. It's part of our being his witnesses.

Also, it's not just what prayer does **through** us; it's what prayer does **to** us. The process of our praying shapes our character to be more like Jesus. What more powerful witness is there that we are Jesus' disciples than when others see in us the results of our having had intimate conversation with God the Father, our joy, our love, our vision, our changed character?

3. To Give God the Father Glory

The ultimate reason that God answers our prayers is to give the Father glory. Just as the greatest source of unbelief in God is the results of sin, the greatest source of glory to God is the results of his redeeming our broken world. When we pray to God to transform bits of earth into bits of heaven people glorify God. With prayer we can do this right where we are, to our little bit of creation.

II. How God Answers Prayer

Now we face the question “How does God answer prayer?” What is the process and means that enables a prayer that is nothing more than words or thoughts to be translated into results in the spiritual, human and material realm?

This question raises a host of philosophical and theological questions. Let us for the time being put these aside and reflect simply upon the means that we find narrated in the Scriptures. Let us also enter this topic with a deep reverence, for we are facing the mystery of God's activity among us

In the Bible we find that there are at least five ways that God will work to answer prayer. These are as follows:

1. Through the Control or Manipulation of Natural Processes.
2. Through Providential Control of Human History
3. Through Angels
4. Through Outpourings of the Holy Spirit
5. Through God's People Who Listen and Obey

A. Through Control or Manipulation of Natural Processes.

A western worldview often assumes a fixed Newtonian universe that operates like a well-tuned machine. While God may have built the machine and set it in motion, according to that worldview He no longer has any active involvement.

This vision, however, is not at all consistent with Scripture. We find the following example of God answering prayer through natural forces:

1. **Elijah commanded a drought and then prayed for rain. (I Kings 18:42-46)**



The drought set up the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. God was working through Elijah to bring the Israelites back to faith in Yahweh, not Baal.

2. **God's contest with Pharaoh in the release of the Hebrew slaves: Exodus 7-15**

The plagues and the parting of the Red Sea all involved power over nature and came in response to the cry and the prayers of the oppressed people.

3. **Jesus, asleep in the boat when the storm came. Luke 8:22-25**

Jesus calmed the wind and the waves in response to the desperate pleas of His disciples, "Master, Master, we are

perishing!" In this way, Jesus revealed his power to his disciples.

4. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead: John 11:41-44

Jesus raised Lazarus in response to the prayers of Martha and Mary. This miracle came the week before Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem bringing many Jews to faith in Jesus and foreshadowed Jesus' triumph over death.

God manipulates natural processes in answer to prayer in order to further his kingdom.

• Do we have a similar authority over nature?

Yes, we do, as this authority fulfills God's purposes. At creation human beings were given dominion over the earth. Yet, this dominion was corrupted and severely limited by the fall. As new creatures in Jesus Christ, this original dominion is being restored and may be used for the advancement of God's Kingdom on earth.

We see this authority over nature when we pray for healing and see a physical restoration. This authority extends to nature as well. This might sound presumptuous, but here in rainy Seattle I have often prayed for the rain to stop long enough for an exercise of outdoor ministry to take place. It was raining on the day of this video shoot. I commanded the clouds to stop raining in the name of Jesus. My videographer and I went to the park in faith. The rain slowed down and stopped as we set up. The rain resumed just after the final take two hours later. It's not magic. It's just God answering prayer in order to advance his kingdom.

B. Through Providential Control of Human History

God works not only in the lives of individuals, but in the course of nations. God uses governments, presidents, kings and dictators to work out His purposes. This means that we have the privilege of praying not just for our friends, but for our nation, for just social structures, for good outcomes for elections, for better government, for better international relations. "*He rules over the nations.*" Psalm 22:28. He does, in part, this through us and through our prayers.

In Old Testament times, Cyrus the Great was seen as the instrument of the God

"Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone, ...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'" Isaiah 44:24,28.

God raised up this Persian emperor to undo the Babylonian captivity of the Jews giving them permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their homes. God moved through Cyrus to accomplish his purposes.

What of world rulers today? Does God still use them today as He did Cyrus? I believe so. Look at the rise of Winston Churchill and the defeat of Nazi Germany, Ronald Reagan and the fall of the Soviet Union. Or Abraham Lincoln and the abolition of slavery in the US or Nelson Mandela and the end of Apartheid in South Africa. I believe these men were part of the answer to the prayers of many believers in those countries crying out for justice, to undo the evil that had become structurally built into their nations.

C. Through Angels

Sometimes God answers prayer through the agency of angels. We see this clearly in the story of Peter being released from prison. Acts 12:1-17.

An angel of the Lord set him free and led him out. *Why angels?* Why not? “*Are not angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*” Hebrews 1:14.

In accounts of angels they often do something that requires involvement with the natural order, but do not require circumventing the natural law. In the case of Peter this meant opening doors, loosing leg irons, and leading him in a dazed state out the prison doors into the street.



I have not aware of seeing angels, But I read about Brother Yun, a current leader in the Chinese house churches and the Back to Jerusalem movement. He recounts in The Heavenly Man of being set free from a number of Chinese prisons by angels. So many that, that in one prison, they broke his legs in order to keep him from walking out. However, one day an angel came, healed his legs and then walked him out of the high security prison, opening doors, distracting guards, and finally walking him through the front gate as a delivery truck was entering the prison grounds. All without anyone noticing.

A man told me of an angelic encounter he had while visiting my church for the first time. He was recently sober and nervous to be in worship. As he closed his eyes during a time of prayer, he felt someone pass by and sit next to him, slightly depressing the pew seat. The man opened his eyes and didn't see anyone next to him. He was convinced an angel was sitting next to him. This presence made him feel safe and convinced him that he had found his church home.

D. Through Outpourings of the Holy Spirit

Whenever Christians pray for the advancement of the Gospel, one of the ways God will answer is by sending waves of the Holy Spirit.

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.
Acts 4:29-31.

Through this outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Believers were empowered for witness, and God works in healing and in signs and wonders.

If you read about the history of revival in the United States, you will read of many, such outpourings.

In the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards wrote of a town in Connecticut where the presence of the Holy Spirit was so strong, that the jails were empty. One man, a skeptic, came to that town to transact business, and when he entered the city limits, the Spirit came over him in such sweetness and power that he went to the nearest church so he could confess his sins and commit his life to following Christ.

I am praying with a number of other members of the Dunamis fellowship in the Northwest for God to send such an outpouring.

E. Through God's People Who Listen and Obey:

The primary way that God answers prayer is through the Holy Spirit guiding a follower of Jesus to do or say something.



Cornelius was a devout man who feared God and prayed constantly to God. (Acts 10:2) The angel appeared to him and told Cornelius that his prayers and alms had ascended as a memorial before God.

Cornelius first had to start the answering process by acting in obedience to the first command of the angel, which was to send men to Joppa and bring Peter. Acts 10:4-7.

He responded in obedience sending two servants and a soldier to Joppa to fetch Peter.

Meanwhile God gave Peter a vision to prepare him to overcome the barriers of a Jew eating with Gentiles. (Acts 10:9-16) The Holy Spirit spoke to Peter telling him to go with the men whom Cornelius had sent. Acts 10:17-23.

Peter acted in obedience and, overcoming a lifetime of prejudice, went with them. God honored this obedience by pouring the Holy Spirit out upon them as at Pentecost. Acts 10:23-48. This brought the gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles.

This is a remarkable story revealing the various means that God used to answer the prayers of these people. The key, however, was the role of Peter, who had to obey.

Just as we pray for something or someone, we need to be ready to be a part of the answer. It is often in our obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit that the prayers of others are answered. I encourage you to share experiences you've had of this happening in your small group.

Conclusion

God delights to answer our prayers in order to bear good fruit, to prove that we are his disciples and to bring God glory. He answers our prayers through the natural world, through working through world leaders and nations, through angels, through outpourings of the Holy Spirit, and through his people who listen and obey his promptings.

Our job is to pray and wait in expectancy for his wonderful answers. Let God choose the means, the method. All for His Glory.

III. Practical Exercises for Prayer and Discussion:

Listening Prayer - Time with God Alone

Choose one of the following questions, reflect on it, listen for God's answers and record them in your journal.

- Ask God to show you the variety of ways in which He has answered prayer in your life. Praise Him for those answered prayers. Invite him to use you to answer the prayers of others.
- What would it take to believe that God loves you enough to draw you into his projects together with him? Why not ask Him to let you create something with Him? What thoughts and feelings does this possibility generate in you?

Discussion Points - In your small group

1. In what ways have you experienced God's answers to prayer? What have you learned about the ways of God from such experiences?
2. How has God used you to answer other people's prayers? What did you learn about your role in God's work from this experience?
3. Have you had an encounter with an angel, in an answer to prayer? If so, share it.
4. In your experience, how has God answered prayer by working through nature?

Prayer Exercise:

In this lesson we have listed the various ways that God answers prayer. Move into groups of 2. Let each person take 2-3 minutes to share how they have seen God answer prayer in their own life or the life of someone they know.

For the week ahead:

Here are some suggestions for you to use in your times of seeking God this week:

- Meditate on the mystery of and awe of God in choosing to work through the prayers of his people.
- Apply the image of a growing garden as God's means of answering prayer to your own experience. Ask God to reveal the cultivating still needs to be done in your heart to bring forth fruit that advances His kingdom.
- Reflect on the question for the Listening Prayer time which you did not address during the lesson today.

Into the Wilderness:
Growing in Friendship with God
Lesson # 6

The Dunamis Course #3
The Power of Prayer



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

In our last lesson, we covered why and how God answers prayer. In this lesson we deal with what for many of us is the most painful part of our growing in the work of prayer. the problem of God seeming not to answer our prayers and the spiritual season known as “wilderness” when we experience the silence of God

I. Unanswered Prayer

Have you ever asked:

“Well, Lord! I know you do indeed answer prayer. But why does it sometimes take so long?

Or what about faithful Christians praying for years for someone to come to salvation or to experience healing yet have seen no results at all.

Often this experience of unanswered prayer has left us with doubt about the usefulness of prayer or even doubts as to existence of God. For some it has left a great bitterness and even destroyed their faith in God.

These are serious issues in our life of prayer that must be addressed directly, if we are to grow in this dynamic relationship with God.

Persistence in prayer

Jesus taught us to persist in prayer.

*He said, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's **shameless audacity** he will get up and give him as much as he needs. Luke 11:5-8.*

R.A. Torrey described the practical application of this teaching on persistence as follows:

"The central lesson in this parable of our Lord's is, that, when we pray, if we do not obtain the thing the first time we ask for it, we should pray again; and if we do not obtain it the second time, we should pray a third time; and if we do not obtain it the hundredth time we pray, we should go on praying until we do get it.

Prayer then becomes a dynamic engagement with God which feels a lot like wrestling. Jacob wrestled one night with an angel and would not let go until the angel blessed him. We are encouraged by Jesus to have this same attitude of Jacob; apparently the Father likes us to wrestle with him, not letting go until we have received what we have been asking for.



JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL FROM A PHOTOGRAPH LENT BY THE PAINTER
Jacques Patisson, Modern French School

There is something important that happens to us in the midst of this wrestling. The lesson for unanswered prayer is, don't give up. Keep pressing in. Persist in prayer.

II. The Silence of God

But sometimes God not only does not seem to answer prayer; he seems to be absent! More terrible than unanswered prayer is a season of God's silence. This is the wilderness.

A. Jesus in the Wilderness

Jesus experienced the wilderness on several occasions.

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. Mark 1:12-13.

This came right after Jesus was baptized. In the wilderness Jesus struggled with Satan who challenged Jesus to misuse his power and authority. Satan tempted Jesus like he tempted Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. However, unlike the first Adam, Jesus, the second Adam, did not give in to Satan and he proceeded to fulfill his God-given mission.

The most terrible of all wildernesses was when Jesus was on the cross dying, engulfed by the power of evil. There in the iron grip of the power of death, experiencing the silence of the Father, Jesus gave voice to all the misery and pain of lost humanity outside of Eden *"At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Mark 15:33-34.

Jesus experienced this wilderness for our sakes. And those he calls as his disciples he also will send into the wilderness.

What Does the Wilderness Feel Like?

- A sense of God's absence and his silence.
- Spiritual dryness—prayer becomes empty, the Bible no longer speaks and worship no longer lifts you into presence of God.
- A deep Restlessness.
- Intense battles with temptation.
- The unpleasant awareness that you are being led to face things in yourself that you do not want to face.
- Deep resistance to doing God's revealed will.
- Loss of joy and purpose, even when you are experiencing fruitfulness in ministry.
- Confusion about calling and purpose.
- Fruitlessness in life and ministry.

What happens to us in the wilderness?

- We cry out to God and are met by his silence.
- We stumble and feel we will never recover.
- Our illusions of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness are stripped away, showing our naked, sinful selves.
- We meet the devil in a thousand forms who tempts and torments us.

The Key to Getting Through the Wilderness.

Going Deeper



“The endurance of darkness is preparation for great light.”

St John of the Cross was a 16th century Spanish mystic and Carmelite friar, the confessor of St Theresa of Avila. He experienced the wilderness and wrote of it as “the dark night of the soul.”

Since God wraps himself in darkness, our experience of darkness is our actually drawing more closely to God. The props of faith are knocked out, so we relate to God more fully by faith.

His writings were a sure guide for me through a season in the wilderness.

There’s an old expression, “if you find yourself going through hell, keep going.” How do we keep going?

- **Persistence in Prayer.**

We keep praying even if we feel nothing and hear nothing and God does not answer or give any hint of his existence. It is a matter of discipline.

- **Persist in Obedience.**

We keep right on walking in what we know is true - even if there is no evidence that God exists. This is truly a terrible time! Yet, just like the season of winter, the silence of God has its purpose.

What are the Benefits of Unanswered Prayer and the Wilderness?

1. These Seasons of Struggle and Silence Strengthen our Relationship with God.

As we persist in prayer and struggle to obey, our faithfulness and commitment strengthens. Our prayers are refined, molded and shaped to be more in accordance with the will of God. Not only are our requests refined, but we are refined. As we wrestle with God, the fire of his presence, a fire that can only touch us through the intimacy of embrace and struggle, will melt and mold us.

A Personal Example.

I’ve been through several seasons in the wilderness. I had one, 33 years ago, that began with a vision. I was praying and fasting about returning to India as a missionary. I felt clear guidance at the beginning of the fast that I was not to return. I replied, “Ok, but I still have a day and a half to fast and pray. What should I pray about?” I sensed a clear call to pray for myself. And then I saw a vision of the garden tomb, with the stone blocking the entrance. I knew that my heart was inside the tomb. I knew that I was to pray for God to roll away the stone in order to set my heart free. That was the last time I heard from God for the next 18 months. I entered into an extended silence where not only did God seem absent, my life fell to pieces. I was sad, confused. Plus I had never heard about the wilderness. I didn’t know that God might be working through this experience. I just felt abandoned and alone, a failure in every way.

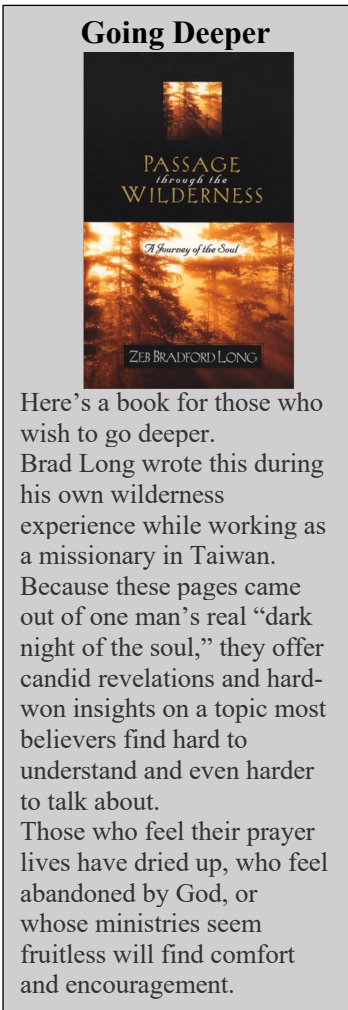
Looking back, I see the loving hand of God at work through that terrible time. I see how I had built a false self-founded on my pride. A self that needed to fall apart so God could raise up a truer self. In the midst of this season, God drew me closer to himself and also to my true self.

2. What is the Purpose of Spiritual Warfare?

In general, the heightened Spiritual warfare in the wilderness energizes the soul, calling up the will to more fully engage with and agree with God. The difficulty of battle, when faced, results in spiritual maturity. This battle also exposes areas of compromise in our lives, because the devil will attack our weakest points. Shoring up the points of attack result in greater integrity of character, greater personal purity. Spiritual warfare brings maturity and personal integrity.

3. Why Do these Seasons Take So Long?

God's Time Is Not Our Time. We usually think in terms of the present and can barely look a few weeks into the future. But with God, we are engaged with a being who has an eternal perspective. What may seem like an exhausting eon of walking through the wilderness or waiting for a prayer to be answered, is just a fleeting moment in the eyes of God.



Also, it often takes time for the components of God's answers to fall into place. Often the answer to our prayers demand a complex combination of people, history, and circumstances.

For example, when the Hebrews enslaved in Egypt, cried out for deliverance.

" a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son... Exodus 2:1-2. This son was Moses who was destined to lead the Hebrews to freedom. However, even after being born, he needed 80 years of preparation. God was answering the prayers, but only their grandchildren would see the results! God hears our prayers, but often it takes a long time to answer them.

Personal example.

All through seminary I dreamt of returning to Seattle as a pastor to minister. However, God sent me and my family to a church in East Tennessee. There, I prayed hard for God to release me and open up a call to Seattle. After 6 ½ years, I finally sensed God releasing me to search for a new call. It was then that I discovered that the church in Seattle that I most would like to pastor had just started looking for a new senior pastor. After I was chosen as pastor and moved to Seattle, I saw that my years of struggle in Tennessee had equipped me to face the challenges of this new call in Seattle. If I had come any earlier, I would not have been ready, both professionally and personally. I also saw, in hindsight, how my children had benefited

from our years in a wonderful neighborhood in Tennessee.

The wilderness seems long. But don't worry. God has the big picture. You will not miss out. God's timing is perfect.

Conclusion

Waiting on God exercises our faith. The wilderness kills our pride. Both drive us into deeper intimacy with God and greater reliance upon the Holy Spirit. The result will be greater empowerment and fruitfulness for Jesus Christ.

In the time of struggle, in the time of waiting, we have a momentous choice. Mistrust God and give up. Let go of all our hopes and dreams. Or we can trust God and let persistence do its work. Giving up on God leads to disappointment and frustration not just for us, but also for God who dearly wished these visions and plans to become real. Persistence in trusting God leads to the fulfillment of the visions and plans God has placed in our hearts. This will be a great benefit not just for us but for many others. So in the crucible of waiting, we have a choice. The choice is ours.

VII. Practical Exercises for Prayer and Discussion

Listening Prayer - Time with God Alone

Choose one of the following questions. Reflect on the question, listen for God's answer and record it in your prayer journal.

- If you have experienced times of wilderness, ask God to show you what he was trying to kill as well as grow in your life during that time. Thank him for the work of transformation which is completed and that which continues. Thank him for his faithfulness, even in that difficult place, and re-commit to following him wherever it leads you.
- If you have not experienced times of wilderness, talk to God about your willingness to follow him, even into the unknown and lonely places of wilderness. (Recognize, however, that the timing of wilderness seasons are within God's sovereign control, not yours.)

Discussion Points - In Your Small Group

1. Consider the wilderness experiences of Jesus, Moses, Joseph and Paul.

How critical were their wilderness seasons to their ultimate usefulness to God? What lessons from their wilderness experiences can you apply to your own life?

2. If you have experienced times in the wilderness, share some of your story with your group. What fruit was God building in you through that experience? How did you die to self in that time?
3. What seemed to trigger times of wilderness in your life? How was it that those times came to an end?
4. Discuss the following: God cares more about our character and his Kingdom than he does about our comfort. Do you agree or disagree? How does this challenge our current worldview and notions of what is "good" and "bad"?

Prayer Exercise

In this lesson we talked about the spiritual condition of wilderness. In groups of 3, talk about your own experiences of wilderness. Perhaps you have not yet personally experienced it. Perhaps you have questions about it or maybe you are dreading it. Or, maybe you are currently in the middle of a time of wilderness or can talk about a time of wilderness in the past. Allow each member of the group to share some questions or comments related to spiritual wilderness

For The Week Ahead

- Pray for those who are currently in the wilderness, for their strength and faithfulness to God even in the midst of silence and temptations.

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- Discuss with God your fears of the wilderness, and any reluctance to seek intimacy with God if it could result in a wilderness experience.
- Read and meditate on Psalm 91.

Into the Gap: The Call to Intercession

Lesson # 7

*The Dunamis Course #3
The Power of Prayer*



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

In the last lesson we dealt with those painful times when we must persist in prayer because there are no answers, or when we experience the silence of God in the wilderness. The Wilderness and persistence in prayer function as the boot camp for intercessory prayer, they prepare us for the work of intercession in which we are called to share with God in shaping reality.

In these next three lessons we will focus on intercession. Today we'll go deeper into what exactly is intercession, and then describe a few ways we are invited into intercession.

I. Jesus As Our Model Intercessor

To understand the work of intercession we begin with Jesus. He is our teacher and model of Intercessory prayer. In the Bible there are three titles for Jesus as Intercessor. These titles describe this work of intercession that Jesus is calling us to.

A. Advocate. 1 John 2:1b.

*"...but if anyone does sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins,"* (1 John 2:1b, RSV)

The image here is of a court room, where Jesus is before the judge—God the Father, not just representing us but pleading our case by presenting himself in our stead. As our advocate, Jesus defends us before the Father when we have sinned, broken God's law. Not only advocate but he is the expiation for our sins, expiation—blotting out our sins, thus removing the offense that dropped us into court in the first place.

B. Mediator. Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24.

*"For there is one God, and there is one **mediator** between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all,"* 1 Timothy 2:5, RSV.

The mediator is one who stands between two people enabling communication or the resolution of difficulties. Jesus is the one who stands between us and God the Father. As our mediator, Jesus enables us to communicate with the Father. Again, this title is linked with Jesus being our ransom. Ransom—the price paid to free a captive. Jesus restores our relationship with God by freeing us from captivity to sin, and then continues on as mediator to assist in our ongoing communication within this restored relationship.

C. Intercessor. Roman 8:34, Hebrews 7:25.

*"Who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed **intercedes** for us?"* Romans 8:34, RSV.

The Greek meaning of "intercessor" is, "to meet with, come between." Intercession means literally to stand between, to become involved in the conflict. The essence then of what Jesus does for us;

First, he becomes involved in the conflict in decisive ways. He died for our sins, taking the consequences of sin, as he stood between a righteous God and sinful humanity.

Secondly, he sits at the right hand of the Father lifting our concerns before him. He stands between us and God the Father and enables communication and communion to take place between us.

Third, as Jesus enters the world and its conflict, he releases God's redemptive power into the world. He also stands between us and Satan, the accuser of the brethren, defeating the powers of death, and setting us free from Satan's grip on us.

Focusing on the person of Jesus as our intercessor is a great consolation. At the center of the universe, at the heart of God, is Jesus Christ who knows us, loves us, and prays for us. He, in himself, is our mediator, our advocate, our intercessor constantly praying for us! This is how the bible defines, describes intercession.

Jesus Christ Calls Us to Join Him in His Work of Intercessory Prayer

A. Jesus Restores to Us Our Original Dominion Given Us When Created in the Image of God

As we join with Jesus in Intercession, we share with him in dominion over the earth. This was the original vision that God had when he created us.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen 1:26-28, NIV)

The term "rule over" is also translated "dominion" which is what a King possesses as he rules over a people or land. In the beginning we were designed, as the image of God, to rule, to have dominion over the earth. This was God's plan but as Genesis records, our first parents Adam and Eve fell into sin, and so this sin has distorted our rule with evil.

Now Jesus Christ is transforming us from within and empowering by the Holy Spirit, so we are fit to rule as we were originally designed. Through the grace of God and the working of the Holy Spirit who connects us with Jesus, we may step into this very same position of authority that Christ occupies.

It is from this position that we are called into the work of intercession. We are called, just like Jesus Christ, to step into the conflict and continue his work. In his lesson on prayer, Jesus tells us to pray "your kingdom come". He is inviting us to join the conflict of opposing the kingdom of Satan and establishing the Kingdom of God. This is a call to join Jesus in the battle to restore earth to the glory it first held. "on earth as it is in heaven." Bringing down bits of heaven to earth in order to restore it. This is done primarily through intercession.

B. Jesus Gives Us Intercessory Prayer as the Primary Tool for Doing His Work

Jesus gives us this call to join him in this work of intercessory prayer because this is the primary tool and the starting point for doing his work on earth. As we have consistently taught in our Dunamis Project, the role of the Holy Spirit is to equip Christians to be the means through whom Jesus will continue to work as Prophet, Priest and King. Healing, leading people to salvation in Jesus, and defeating the power of evil all flow from this work of prayer in which we are asking things of Jesus in his Name.

II. Receiving the Call to Intercessory Prayer

So, how do we receive the call to intercede?

A. A Burden or a Nudge to Pray for Someone

At times Jesus through the Holy Spirit, directly reveals the prayer need and call us to pray.

This might come during the day, and especially at night, when our minds are quiet and we are unoccupied. If you awake with someone strongly on our mind, or if during the day, you begin to think about a friend or a concern, ask, “Lord, do you want me to pray for this.” And if the answer is yes, ask, “How shall I pray for them?” Then follow through.

An example. This happened to me just last night. I had a dream where I saw a close friend of mine. He was dressed like the pope, only all his garments were made of gold. When I awoke, I wondered why I was dreaming of him. So, I asked the Holy Spirit, “do you want me to pray for my friend?” I heard Yes. So, I asked, “How should I pray for him?” I heard, “He is discouraged.” So, I took some time last night to pray for him to be encouraged.

The point is that the Holy Spirit delights in inviting us into this dance of cooperation. In order to be a better dance partner we must learn to hear the way the Holy Spirit will speak to us and then, of course, obey.

B. The Call to Intercede: The Invitation Given Through Other People

Most often the invitation to intercede comes through a request from someone.

St. Paul, on a number of occasions, urgently asked other Christians to pray for him and his work. Paul recognized his dependence upon the intercessions of others.

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; and pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak." Colossians 4:2-4.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel." Ephesians 6:18-19.

Take these requests for prayer seriously. Your prayers of intercession are powerful and effective. PRMI employs intercessor at all of its events. We train and deploy intercessors so that we have two “on the wall” posted during all teaching and times of ministry. The Team Leader of these events will receive important information of stuff going on the spiritual realm from these

intercessors, so he or she can act accordingly. Event Intercessors are the spiritual antennae that are tuned into the move of the enemy and more importantly, the move of the Holy Spirit.

C. The call to intercede: the invitation comes from the world around us.

Often, we just see stuff that needs prayer. It could be an adult yelling at a child, or a person soliciting spare change on the street, or an article in the news. It can be regular stuff that could benefit from intercession.

For example, for years, every Wednesday, I met with a small group of pastors and prayed through this neighborhood. This park was a rare piece of nature in Seattle's most densely populated neighborhood. We prayed for safety, for no drugs, or violence. We prayed for people to be able to breathe and relax in the park and even through the natural beauty reflect on a good creator. I included the building site next to the part where SDOT was building a light rail station. I prayed for the project to go safely, no accidents. That the project would be under budget and on schedule. Years later, after the project was completed, I was at a local Chamber of Commerce meeting and heard a report from the guy in charge of safety over the construction of the light rail station. After the meeting, I asked the fellow if there had been any accidents. He replied, No not a one. I asked if the project was achieved on time, if it was on budget. He replied that the project was actually completed six months ahead of schedule and under budget. I then told him of my pastors' group and of our specific prayers for all three success. He wasn't sure how to respond.

But the point is, if you see something you believe needs prayer, pray for it. Your prayers are powerful and effective and make a positive difference in the real world.

Conclusion

Intercession is this wonderful invitation that we are given to be like Jesus to be an advocate, a mediator, an intercessor for those around us, for the world today. So that in our prayers, whether requested by the Holy Spirit, others, or the need around us, we may release God's power and will into this little bit of earth that we are a part of, transforming it into the glory for which it was created, bringing God's kingdom here to earth.

III. Practical Exercises for Prayer and Discussion

Listening Prayer - Time with God Alone

Consider the three titles of Jesus that define his work of intercession: Advocate, Mediator, Intercessor. Choose one to focus on and discuss with God in your listening time. Ask him to show you how Jesus' work of intercession relates to the call the Holy Spirit has on you as an intercessor. Record in your prayer journal what you sense God's saying to you.

Discussion Points - In Your Small Group

1. Describe a time when you received the call to intercede directly from the Holy Spirit.
2. Describe a time when you were asked by a friend or acquaintance to intercede, and you also had confirmation from the Holy Spirit that you were to commit to that intercession. How did the Holy Spirit make that confirmation clear to you?
3. Discuss Brad's comment in the opening paragraphs, that "Wilderness is the boot camp for intercessory prayer." If you have experienced a wilderness time, reflect on the relationship of that wilderness experience to your grounding as an intercessor.
4. Discuss the implication of our being given dominion and authority as it relates to the work of intercession.

Prayer Exercise

This will be an opportunity for you to practice interceding in a group. Form groups of 3. If you as a group have a common concern or God gives you a "group project" to pray about, use that. Otherwise, have each person in the group share something they would like prayer for. This could be a personal concern, an issue from a group they are involved in (like their local congregation) or a burden to pray for a specific part of the world. As each topic is shared, join together in interceding for that concern.

For the Week Ahead

- Read the appendix below, and reflect with God about Archer Torrey's comments that the place of an intercessor is standing with Jesus in the heavenlies.
- Read and meditate on Ephesians 1 and 2. Pray the prayer for yourself that Paul prays for the Christians of Ephesus in Chapter 1: 18-23. As the Holy Spirit reveals to you the position and authority of Jesus, ask him next to reveal to you your position with Jesus.

IV. Appendix: The Position of the Intercessor

One of the most wonderful aspects of being called to be an intercessor, is that we are called to share in advancing the Kingdom, both in heaven and on earth. We have given the biblical basis of this, but does it actually happen? Yes! In this manual I have given a number of experiences of intercessors involved in struggles in the heavenlies as well as on earth. There follows a further part of the mystical experience that I had a few years ago when I was called into missions. Part of this story is given in the Appendix to Lesson 2 concerning the basic ingredients to prayer.

When I was caught up into heaven I saw Jesus Christ and God the Father as well as many of the great saints of the Church. I also was aware of my grandfather and others who had passed away. To my amazement I did see Archer Torrey who at that time was very much alive. Bill Emrich who was with me the night all this took place provided a detailed report of what took place. There follows an excerpt he wrote that has helped me understand better the position of the intercessor.

As Brad describes in his report, he was rested in the Spirit. Three or four folks were surrounding Brad, and I sat on the floor at his right side. While Brad was resting, he began to describe this vision he was having. He covered his eyes with his hands, and on more than one occasion said in a questioning tone, "Am I losing my mind? I'm seeing into heaven. It's almost too wonderful for me!" Again, he would repeat, "Am I losing my mind?" At one point, he removed his hands from his eyes, and opened his eyes. There was a gaze on his eyes that I have not seen before in Brad's eyes. The look was as though he truly "was not here, but clearly was in another place." If I didn't feel that I knew better, I would have wondered if I were not looking into the eyes of someone who had "gone absolutely mad." But something else began to happen to me during this time.

To explain, I'm outwardly fairly non-expressive with my emotions, especially, I tend not to cry easily. But as I was watching this whole episode unfold in front of my eyes, I suddenly began to weep and didn't understand why. The tears were not tears of sadness or of joy. They were a different kind of tears, and I can't explain anything more about them, except to say that they were there.

Brad began to share with those near him people who he was identifying in the vision: there was Jesus, there was a woman he identified as being Mary, there was Calvin . . . then Brad grew sullen and said, "there's Archer." He told how he was seeing all of them "praying" and affirming what Brad has titled the Philip Endeavor, and saying that they had been praying for this, and that it came from the very heart of God. (Note by Brad Long— When I sent this to Archer Torrey, he asked like he was a little offended, "Why did you grow sullen when you saw me? "Archer!" I said, "Of course I was sullen, when I saw you there in heaven with the angels and the saints. I thought you had died." Archer's response astonished me, "No I am not dead yet! That is the place of the intercessor; we are not just working on earth but standing with Jesus in the heavenly places where we share his power, love and authority.")

This is an amazing confirmation first of the place of Jesus as revealed to us in Ephesians 1:18-23. Further it confirms our place with Jesus Christ in the heavenly places sharing with his rule and authority as revealed in Ephesians 2:4-10. This is the true position of intercessor: In heaven with Jesus Christ, but on earth doing his work.

The Work of Intercession

Lesson # 8

The Dunamis Course #3 The Power of Prayer



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

In the previous lesson we dealt with a definition of intercession and the call to the work of intercessory prayer. In this lesson we explore more in depth the tasks of an intercessor and how it works in the field.

I. Lessons from Moses the Intercessor

Moses was known for many things. But did you know that he was one of the greatest intercessors of all time. In his wrestling with God, Moses demonstrated the fundamental tasks of intercessory prayer.

A. Provision

Intercessors are often called to pray down provision, especially if the ministry is funded by faith.

In the wilderness the Hebrews turned to Moses to meet their basic needs. Moses, in turn, took their needs before God.

For example, When the people had no water, they complained bitterly.

"So Moses cried to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.'" (Exodus 17:4)

God then told Moses to strike the rock, and water came out after he struck it.

Often our role as intercessor will be to take to God the needs of others and pray down the provision for those needs. This will especially be the case for those ministries or individuals who have been called to live by faith.

For example, George Muller cared for hundreds of orphans in 19th century London. He built, staffed and provisioned several entire orphanages, supported solely by donations received through prayer. He never publicized the need. His faith was tested throughout with many remarkable results. He wrote of sitting down to breakfast with all his staff and children even though there was no food. Muller led them all in prayer, thanking God for breakfast. When they finished, they heard a knock on the door. It was the neighborhood baker, with enough food for breakfast.

At my church, I remember a session meeting where we discussed a significant financial shortfall. After discussion, we all joined hands and thanked God for His abundant provision. The next morning, we received a single check that resolved the shortfall.

Intercession can be praying for provision.

B. Standing in The Gap

In Exodus 32, while Moses was on the mountain of God, the people fell into great sin. They forged a golden calf and held a drunken orgy to worship it. God was furious and told Moses he was ready to wipe them out. He would have, had it not been for Moses' urgent intercession.

"But Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people, whom thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, "With evil intent did he bring them forth, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth"? Turn from thy fierce

wrath and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou didst swear by thine own self, and didst say to them, "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever."

"And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people." Exodus 32:9-14.

This is an incredible glimpse into God's dealing with human beings and the vital role of the intercessor. This concept of God changing his mind reveals the dynamic nature of God's dealings with us.

God doesn't have a plan so much as a purpose for us. We may frustrate God's plans for us, but through prayer, we release God's power for shifting circumstances in order that God's purposes for us and our loved ones, our world may be fulfilled even when we and our loved mess up.

Remember our titles of advocate, mediator, intercessor. Intercession calls us to advocate for those who have failed, to mediate a resolution when punishment is deserved. This is where we may also stand as we intercede for those under the judgment of God or for those who struggle to give birth to some aspect of the Kingdom of God.

C. Special Communion with God

An unexpected bonus of such struggle is our entering into a special communion with God.

"Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Exodus 33:11b.

So direct were Moses' encounters with the living God that his face radiated the glory of God, and Moses had to wear a veil.

Moses even asked for and received a glimpse of the very presence of God.

"Moses said, 'I pray thee, show me thy glory.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name "The Lord;" and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 'But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live.' And the Lord said, 'Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by " Exodus 33:18-23.

Prayer in the name of Jesus and in the Holy Spirit is the cleft in the rock where God may set us and where he may grace us with the passing of his presence.

To conclude this section, with the work of intercession, we may pray for provision, stand in the gap for those who have fallen, and receive perhaps a glimpse of the very presence of God.

II. Lessons from the Battle Against Amalek

The Hebrews' battle with Amalek in the wilderness provides us with two more important points about the work of intercession.

"The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

So, Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up-- one on one side, one on the other-- so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. Exodus 17:8-13.

A. Prayer and Spiritual Warfare

The work of the intercessor is often called to battle with Satan and the powers and principalities of evil. In the Bible, the Amalekites are symbolic of everything opposed to the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

These are not people but demonic powers, that can work either directly or indirectly through people and circumstances to oppose our efforts to advance the kingdom of God

Moses' intercession was key to the Hebrews defeating the Amalekites. The New Testament gives us specific instruction about this type of prayer.

“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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 6:11-12, NIV)

The intercessor is on the front lines of this spiritual warfare. When you are called to engage demonic powers, be assured that you have great authority in the name of Jesus Christ.

An example. My church in Seattle was often a target for demonic attack. Most often this battle was unseen, with demons of mockery trying to discourage the staff, or demons of lust or pride trying to lure leaders into sin. Sometimes the battle was seen. We had a coven come after us, planting fetishes around the property, spray painting curses on the front doors, even chanting outside our prayer room at 3 in the morning. I gathered elders and other leaders every Sunday morning in order to break any curses uttered against the church and pray for a fresh infilling of God's presence.

Intercession is a powerful, spiritual weapon.

B. The Moses Work and the Joshua Work

There is a complex interrelationship between God working through the intercessor, Moses, Aaron and Hur, and God working through those in the field of action, Joshua and his army. The Hebrews battle with the Amalekites provides a vivid depiction of this interrelationship.

Moses is up on the hill interceding; Joshua is down in the valley fighting. But notice the connection between prayer and physical action; Moses is obedient in prayer and Joshua is obedient in leading the army into battle. If either stopped doing what they were called to do, the battle would be lost.

It is important to note that neither Moses nor Joshua worked alone. Moses was backed up by Aaron and Hur who held his staff. Joshua was accompanied by an army of warriors. This teaches us that while there may be a prominent leader these roles may also be cooperate with many supporting roles.

This dynamic may be seen in many examples. The great English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, spoke to the crowds from the pulpit with power and elegance. Yet supporting and enabling the empowered preaching were hundreds of intercessors praying in the basement of the church. He called this “boiler room” the source of his successful preaching.



Charles Spurgeon

Charles Finney was a great 19th century revival preacher. Wherever Finney went there was another man, one whose name history has forgotten but who contributed just as much to the revival. As Finney stood in the pulpit before the crowds, this man kneeled alone before God.

Every missionary, every pastor and church leader who serves on the field is a Joshua requiring a Moses and an Aaron and a Hur on the mountain interceding, upholding them, preparing their way through prayer.

I learned of my need for intercessors ten years ago from my children’s director. When she spoke of my need for people praying for me, it was like a light turning on. Now I have over 60 friends and colleagues to whom I send regular pray requests. Social media has eased this communication, enabling me to send short requests more frequently as well as send quick updates and victory reports.

Moses work of intercession works with Joshua’s work in the field.

C. Politics and World Events

While we have applied the battle with the Amalekites to such matters as the preaching of the Gospel, or leading churches, remember that the original event was an actual military battle between two nations. This dynamic of Moses intercession supporting Joshua engagement applies to world events as well. A great historic example of this was the battle of Dunkirk in World War II.

In the spring of 1940, the Germans were sweeping across Europe. The German army in France had trapped 338,000 British, Belgian, and French soldiers at the town of Dunkirk with their backs to the sea. One more week of advance and Hitler would have captured them all. Setting the stage for the Nazis to invade England.



Allied Solders escaping by sea from Dunkirk. Winston Churchill called this escape a miracle.
Photo from miracleofdunkirk.tripod.com

During the first disastrous phases of the war, Rees Howells, with a few students at the Bible College of Wales, was earnestly doing the work of intercessory prayer. He told his students that they were to apply themselves to prayer as their countrymen in the service were applying themselves to soldiering. Rees Howells and his students were Moses, Aaron and Hur. The English, Belgian and French armies were Joshua and his troops. The extraordinary work of intercessory prayer by the soldiers and the numerous civilians and their families brought about their deliverance.

Praise God for the intercessors, for Rees Howells and his students, but we must not forget Joshua, Winston Churchill, and his army, the fishermen and boat owners who risked their crafts and their lives to sail across the channel to rescue the soldiers. Without them the struggles of the intercessors would have been in vain, the Allied army would have been destroyed and World War II may have ended very differently.

So, the work of intercession undergirds and empowers the front-line work of ministry, even in world events.

Conclusion

Moses modeled for us the role of the intercessor in praying for provision, standing in the gap and experiencing special communion with the Lord. In the Hebrew's battle with the Amalekites, we saw the vital importance of both the Moses work of intercession on the mountain and the Joshua work of fighting in the field. Of the necessity of intercession empowering action. That is the key to advancing the kingdom of God.

I. Practical Exercises for Prayer And Discussion

Listening Prayer - Time with God Alone

• Read Exodus 17: 8-16. Talk to God about the different roles in the battle that Joshua, Moses, Aaron and Hur all played. Ask him to show you what role he is calling you into, in the battle to advance his Kingdom.

Discussion Points - In Your Small Group

1. Share an experience of intercession related to provision.
2. Share a story, if you have one, about a time you have interceded with God to “change his mind”.
3. Share an experience of standing in the gap.
4. Discuss the struggles you have faced as an intercessor. To what extent are struggles an expected part of this experience?
5. Where could you, or do you turn for support as an intercessor? How could you provide that support for someone else, just as Aaron and Hur provided support to Moses?

Prayer Exercise

In this exercise, you will move beyond personal prayer requests to intercede on a larger scale. Working in groups of 4-5 people, pick a country or people group for which you would like to pray. Ask God to show you how to pray for that area or group and then join with each other in asking God for great things.

For the Week Ahead

• Read the biography of great intercessors, such as Rees Howells or E. M. Bounds; or read a book on prayer, such as various books by Andrew Murray, O. Hallsby, Richard Foster, Lloyd John Olgiwie, Wesley Duewel, Alvin Vander Griend or Dutch Sheets.

Appendix 1: The Moses and Joshua Work at the 1993 Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly, from the book ‘Prayer that Shapes the Future’

Doug and I have learned this lesson again and again in our adventures of praying vision into reality. The prayer vigil at the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly has been especially useful as a laboratory for learning to respect this linkage between Moses and Joshua.

Over the last twenty years we have seen a protracted battle for the heart and soul of the Presbyterian Church (USA). In 1993 there came before the General Assembly a study on human sexuality that clearly set aside biblical teaching on sexual ethics. God’s intentions as revealed in Scripture were replaced by the concept of “justice love,” a leftover from “situation ethics” days.

We gathered in Baltimore at the Assembly ready for battle. I was joined by a number of intercessors who came to the Assembly with a sense of urgency that this was a spiritual battle that could only be won through the work of prayer.

The Assembly was marked also by a large gathering of gay rights activists, whose goal was the passage of the report. Evangelicals gathered as well, seeking to defeat the proposal. On the floor as well as in the back rooms, church politicians battled it out, working the system with amendments and counter-amendments. Out on the streets around the convention center, the gays and their supporters held protests and rallies and displayed AIDs quilts.

Generally the intercessors focused on prayer and disengaged from the political maneuverings. The politicians were too busy doing politics to pray, but several did stop by the prayer room to ask for prayer and to thank us for this work. A number of intercessors were on the floor of the Assembly and in the committee rooms praying. Others were in the prayer room on the eighteenth floor of a hotel several blocks from the convention center. The Holy Spirit led those in the prayer room as to how to pray both directly through words of knowledge and by phone calls from those who were out on the floor of the Assembly and in committees.

A. Fasting and Praying

On the second day after learning that the Assembly was going badly for a number of evangelical causes, I (Brad) and several others felt led to fast. It was terrible to receive this guidance because Baltimore was famous for its seafood. I put aside my hope of enjoying the food and went on what was to be a six-day fast.

I had personally never engaged so long or intensely in the work of prayer. But it seemed that the compulsion of the Holy Spirit was upon us, and we did not want to leave the prayer room. For up to eighteen hours a day, from early morning until late at night and during several nights, all night, we labored in prayer. Much of our prayer seemed to be in the realm of vision—of seeing and praying for a biblical vision of the church. That was the positive creative birthing work! The negative work was resisting another reality that seemed to be trying to invade not only the church, but also our own souls.

Finally the day of the vote came. Only three of us were left in the prayer room: Denny Finnegan, Tom Wilcox, and myself. Everyone else had felt released to pray on the floor of the Assembly. We were praying for the commissioners to vote in a way that would give glory to Jesus Christ. We were also led to pray that the demonic strongholds that were energizing this movement to reject biblical morality would be exposed and overturned. We were given a vision of what this stronghold looked like, with names such as “deception” and “Jezebel.” Denny, a Presbyterian minister with proven gifts of discernment, saw this stronghold as a castle built with blocks made from various false teachings.

As we started to take authority over this stronghold in the name of Jesus and to dismantle it piece by piece, we suddenly became aware that there was a hostile presence in the room. It grew in intensity and power. I felt a pressure in my chest as though something was trying to crush my heart. It became hard to breathe. The other two men in the room felt the presence as well. An energy field in the middle of room seemed about to congeal into visible form. We were all frightened and with greater fervor called on the name of Jesus. By this time we had gripped one another’s hands and were urgently praying in tongues. Each time the Holy Spirit gave a name of an evil spirit or a false teaching we commanded it to leave the church and to be replaced by some aspect of biblically revealed truth. As we battled like this, we were aware, on the edges of consciousness, that a battle was taking place in the heavenlies.

As we persisted in prayer, the hostile presence in the room suddenly left. In a vision Denny saw the castle suddenly implode and collapse. We knew that in the realm of the spirit Jesus Christ had defeated the high-level spirits and won the victory, at least for that particular battle. We started to celebrate and give thanks. About ten minutes later, calls started to come in from those who were on the floor of the General Assembly with the good news that after an intense and emotional debate, the sexuality report had been rejected. A battle had been won. We rejoiced that the vision of a denomination alive in

Jesus, rooted in the Word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit, had taken some decisive steps forward. But the war was far from over.

B. Teamwork

For a number of months I was convinced that our work of prayer had brought the victory and was tempted to pride. While I had learned a lot about the principles of prayer that shapes the future, my view of the work of prayer was still too simplistic. God's work was richer and more complex than I had imagined.

This realization came home to me while having supper with Rev. Denn Denning of San Mateo, California. At the General Assembly I had spent the entire time in the prayer room and had not met any of the other people involved in the battle and had not even known that Denn was at the Assembly. That evening he told me that he had been responsible for coordinating Presbyterians for Renewal's efforts at the Assembly to defeat the sexuality report. 7 Denn shared with me a blow by blow account of the battle they had fought on the floor and in the committees. In turn, I told him of our experiences in the prayer room. Amazed, we both stopped talking, realizing that God had coordinated the work of prayer and the political work on the floor of the Assembly. We did not even know of one another's existence, so the Holy Spirit must have orchestrated it. By his design the Moses work and the Joshua work had been in balance, and God acted to bring the church back from apostasy.

In more recent years, we have tried to coordinate these two aspects of the work more closely, and we have seen more progress in reclaiming our denomination for basic biblical ethics.

Nurturing Prayer in the Local Church

Lesson # 9

The Dunamis Course #3 The Power of Prayer



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

Today we'll go through some basics on nurturing prayer in your church. We'll go over where do you start, connecting with leadership, beginning a prayer group, ground rules for praying together as well as prayer ministry for another person. We'll conclude with suggestions for applying the Moses/ Joshua dynamic in your church, connecting intercessors with ministry leaders.

Where do you start?

Start with the Holy Spirit.

- Ask the Holy Spirit to give the people in your congregation a greater desire to pray.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to teach people how to pray and to enable people to pray with passion.
- Ask Him to stir up the gifts of the Spirit within the people in your church and
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your prayers as you pray in the Spirit and with the Spirit.

Beginning a prayer group

Make an appointment with your pastor. Share your passion for prayer and ask for guidance and support. Ask when it would be appropriate to engage your church board or session. If the Holy Spirit is stirring in you, He might be stirring in your congregation's leaders as well.

Find a partner

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to a partner with a similar passion for prayer. Get together with that person and share your desire for more prayer in your church. Listen to their desires as well. Between the two of you, this desire and vision for more prayer will grow. Remember Jesus sent out his disciples in twos. Together pray about who else to invite to join you.

Finding members

God has placed intercessors in your church, believers with a passion for intercession.

Chances are they have been praying about finding more opportunities to pray in your church. Think of it as a treasure hunt and your intercessors are the treasure. Once you find them and then set a time to meet.

What to do at your first meeting.

A. Choose a leader or a pair of leaders and then follow the leader.

A good leader creates a safe, clear structure for the group's prayer. This person does not have to be an eloquent pray-er. Their job is to facilitate the process, so that others can focus on listening to the Holy Spirit and engaging in prayer. The leader lets the group know when to start and when to stop. They set the ground rules and, when necessary, direct the path.

B. Set clear expectations

How often you will meet. Where and when and for how long. Discuss why you are meeting and articulate the purpose of your group in a single sentence. Decide if you want the leader to send out reminders to meet and prayer notes.

C. Dos and don'ts for your group.

a. Dos.

i. Confession.

This is a good place to start. Those who ascend the holy hill of God must have clean hands and a pure heart. Confession is the way to get cleaned up. .

ii. Compassion for the lost, the hurting, the suffering.

Pay attention to who is hurting and lift them up in prayer. Are there any desperate situations in your church or community? Prayer for issues that engage your heart will lead your group to more passionate prayer. Remember Psalm 34:18, *“God is close to those whose heart is breaking.”*

iii. Pray the Scriptures.

Let the Word of God give you the words to pray. Align the needs with God's promises. Pray the prayers in the Bible. The book of Psalms is 100% prayer. The apostle Paul interlaces his prayers all through his letters. Learn from them.

As you pray, pay attention to whatever scripture comes to mind. The Holy Spirit loves to remind us of passages as a way of guiding us.

iv. Build on each other's prayers.

Pay attention to where people are building on each other's prayers, where people say amen to a prayer or add to it. Also, pay attention to just the opposite, where there does not seem to be this “building”. Through this natural group dynamic, you will begin to gain a sense of where the Holy Spirit is, or is not, leading.

b. Don'ts

i. Praying “off topic”

Unless God is specifically leading you in another direction, stick with the subject at hand. For example, a prayer for Aunt Edith's surgery will derail a passionate group plea for the evangelism of a tribe in Africa. The prayer for Aunt Edith is not a bad prayer, but it is in the wrong place at the wrong time.

ii. Praying problems, not solutions

Feel free to pour out your heart to God with your frustrations but be sure to turn to God at some point and begin to pray for a solution. your primary focus is God, the solution giver, not the problem.

iii. Preaching and moralizing

Be aware that when your words are directed more towards the members of the group than they are towards God, you're moving from praying to preaching. Pray upwards not sideways.

iv. Monopolizing

In a group, you need to allow some time and space for others to enter the conversation. There are some people who are ready to rush in and pray, and others who will not pray unless there's a bit of silence ahead of time.

This includes the Holy Spirit. Leave a little time to listen to God rather than just talking to him.

D. Practical Application: Personal Prayer Ministry

This is where one or two people pray for another person. We will cover this in depth in Dunamis 4. For now, keep a few pointers in mind:

1. Let love be your guide. If your main motivation in prayer is love, you will not often go wrong.
2. Listen – to both the person and to the Holy Spirit. Listen for guidance the Holy Spirit will give you on how to pray. Pay attention to the thoughts, images and scriptures that drop into your brain while listening to the request.
3. When you pray, focus on prayer to God, not giving advice to the person. Again, pray upwards not sideways.
4. Respect personal boundaries. Ask permission before laying on hands. Some people are not used to hearing people pray in tongues or the practice of anointing with oil. Check these things out with the person before you do them.
5. Keep requests confidential. Your job is to tell God about these needs not others.

The exception is when you hear of a child or other helpless person being abused. Report this to your pastor.

E. Moses and Joshua work

In Lesson 8 we talked about the complex interrelationship between God working in the intercessor and God working in those who are engaged in hands on ministry. We looked at the battle between the Hebrews and the Amalekites.

Moses was up on the hill interceding; Joshua was down in the valley. Moses was obedient in prayer. Joshua was obedient in leading the army. If either stopped doing what they were called to do, the battle would have been lost.

That same connection between prayer and physical action is needed for the advancement of the Kingdom of God today. However, too often there is a disconnect between intercessors and ministry leaders. Here are a few tips to nurture these connections:

1. Seek prayer/action partnerships

Ministry leaders: As you form committees, initiatives, or programs in your church or ministry, recruit intercessors, those who are willing support that work in prayer.

Intercessors: Offer to come alongside a ministry. Be willing to pray faithfully.

2. Articulate expectations

Ministry leaders: when you ask for prayer, are you simply asking the intercessor to pray or do you want feedback, discernment the intercessor may receive?

Also, how confidential are the requests? Can the intercessors “Share this request with anyone who is willing to pray” to “I would prefer you not share this request with anyone else right now.”

Intercessors: When you are interceding for an event, check with ministry leaders about what form will be most helpful – onsite or offsite. If onsite, should you be visibly present or blend in with the other attendees.

3. Feedback loop

Ministry leaders: Intercessors appreciate having an opportunity to share what God has been saying to them. This might be done in a short debriefing time after an event or just checking in periodically.

Intercessors: Hearing from God about a ministry request does not give you permission to tell them how to do their job. When invited to share what God may have been saying to you about a situation, share the information and then allow the ministry leader to decide what to do with it.

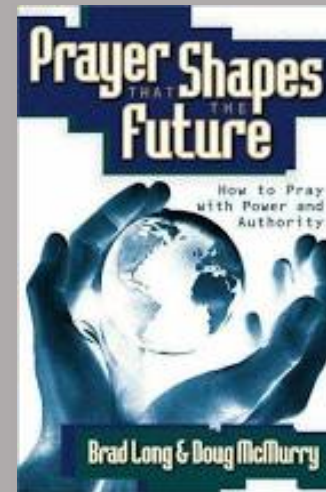
Conclusion

Prayer is the engine that moves the Kingdom of God forward. Nurturing prayer in your congregation will energize your church to fulfill its mission.

Going On from Here

This has been a lot of information. If you want to put together a prayer group or prayer ministry, be sure to go over the written lesson. Also contact the Dunamis leadership in your area. If you are not sure of who to contact, call the PRMI office. They will find a mentor to help you build this ministry. 828-669-7373.

Going Deeper



Much of the material for this course comes from this book. Consider buying it, if you would like more examples and personal illustrations on how dynamic prayer works, how God enables prayer and how to nurture prayer in your congregation.

Practical Exercises for Prayer and Discussion

Listening Prayer - Time with God alone

Reflect on one of the following questions, listen for God's answer and record it in your prayer journal.

- In what specific ways is the Holy Spirit calling you to share with him in the work of prayer?
- Ask God to show you what you may need to do personally to enhance the quality of the prayer groups in which you participate.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any ways in which you may have inhibited the prayer work of a group by monopolizing, preaching and moralizing, self-centered prayer, praying "off the subject", and praying problems, not solutions. Ask God for forgiveness and increased sensitivity to the direction of the Holy Spirit in prayer.

Discussion Points - In your small group

Discuss the statement that, "*Don't treat the person you are praying for as a problem to be solved, but as a person to be loved.*" How might that change your approach to prayer?

Reflect on your experience of praying in groups. What helped you move past your initial reticence to pray out loud for others?

Tell some experiences you've had on building on prayers, in group prayer. What theme did God give you in that prayer time? If you belong to a denomination or a cluster of churches, is God calling you to include them in your prayers?

1. In an ideal world, what qualities and skills would the designated leader of a prayer group possess?
2. If you were the leader of a prayer group, and someone was monopolizing, or otherwise getting in the way of effective group prayer how would you handle the situation?
3. A variety of gifts are needed to complete a work of prayer; thus we need each other. Tell about experiences you've had in praying in groups, in which the mix of gifts was evident and powerful.

Prayer Exercise:

This is an opportunity for you to practice praying in a group. This may require practicing new skills or ways of doing things.

Move into groups of 4-6 people. Pick a subject to pray about and a facilitator to lead the group. As you move into prayer, let the facilitator "direct traffic". Consciously build on each other's prayers. After spending about 10 minutes in prayer, close the prayer time. Then spend some time discussing what worked, what didn't and anything new you experienced in praying in a group.

For the Week Ahead:

1. Read over the final section of this lesson, "Practical Application: Moses and Joshua Work". Reflect on your call to be a Joshua or a Moses. In light of the three directions to

nurture connections between Joshua and Moses work, ask God for clarity about what you are to do next.

2. Read the Appendix: “Building Prayer in the Local Congregation”. Reflect on the following questions:

- Do you believe that God has given to the Christian church the kind of authority in prayer that Martin Luther described in the selections quoted? How would this affect your personal vision as a Christian?
- In your congregation what do you discern are the specific things blocking the conception, birthing, and fulfillment of God’s vision?
- Is God building prayer anywhere among Christians in your community? How can you get your church to participate, to catch the fire?

APPENDIX

BUILDING PRAYER IN THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

– from the book *Prayer that Shapes the Future* by Brad Long and Doug McMurry

Shaping Churches by Prayer

Many of the greatest Christian leaders of the past have noticed a curious phenomenon: When Christians pray separately, their prayers are not as effective as when they pray together. If “one man [could] chase a thousand,” then “two [could] put ten thousand to flight.”{EN1} The increase in power and results is exponential.

We see this potential in Acts 1, when the disciples came together and prayed in one accord in Jerusalem. What was the result? God created the first great wave of Christian evangelistic outreach.

“Common” Prayer

Martin Luther, the great German Reformer, noticed that gathering Christians together increased their prayer power. For Luther, “common prayer” was prayer that Christians prayed “in common” with other Christians in church. The following quote has so affected my own life and ministry that I (Doug) have posted it on my study wall:

O if any congregation were to pray in this way, so that a common, earnest, heartfelt cry of the whole people were to rise up to God, what immeasurable virtue and help would result from such a prayer! What more terrible thing could happen to all evil spirits? What greater work could be done on earth whereby so many pious souls would be preserved and so many sinners would be converted?

For indeed, the Christian church has no greater power or work against everything that may oppose it than such common prayer. The evil spirit knows this well, and therefore he does all that he can to prevent such prayer. This is why he lets us build handsome churches, endow many colleges, make anthems, read and sing, celebrate many masses, and multiply ceremonies beyond all measure. This brings him no sorrow. On the contrary, he helps us to do it, so that we will regard such ways the best and think that in doing them we have done our whole duty. But when this common, effectual, and fruitful prayer suffers meanwhile, and remains unnoticed because of such hypocrisy, then he has gotten what he is after. For when prayer is subordinated, nobody

takes anything from him and nobody resists him. But if he noticed that we wished to practice this prayer, even if it was under a straw roof or in a pigsty, he would not tolerate it for an instant. He would fear such a pigsty far more than all the high, great, and lovely churches, towers, and bells that ever were, if such prayer were not in them. What matters is not the places and buildings where we assemble, but this unconquerable prayer alone, and our really praying it together and offering it to God. {EN2}

If what Jesus said is true—that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against [the church]” (Matthew 16:18, kjv)—it is true only insofar as the church uses the weapons Christ has given us. Christ did not specifically call us into a political arena, or into a therapeutic arena, or into accumulating buildings and wealth, though all these ingredients may have their place. He called us into prayer.

Jesus addressed his words about the gates of hell not to individual Christians, but to the church. He wants Christians to pray as the church. He wants to form us into an army, subdivided into cohorts who are learning to pray in one accord. The effective army is the army that learns to communicate well, to trust its leaders, to reconnaissance regularly—in short, to function together in one accord. The evil one, Luther noted, does everything he can to prevent this from happening, because he wants to keep his gates intact.

The first part of this chapter will deal with the practical issue of how a local congregation might develop “common prayer” that will conquer Satan and shape God’s future. We will then look at a case study of a congregation that has been profoundly shaped through the work of prayer.

A Work in Process

Montreat Presbyterian Church is the place where my family and I (Brad) worship. A traditional evangelical Presbyterian church, it maintains a deep interest in overseas missions. Under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Calvin Thielman for thirty-three years and now under the leadership of Rev. Richard White, the church has been a praying church.

Over the last several years, we have watched this congregation grow in dynamic prayer. Observing and participating in this process has enabled me to see some principles that may be useful for any church wishing to grow in prayer.

A Praying Pastor

The pastor profoundly affects the atmosphere of a congregation. P. T. Forsyth said, “The preacher whose chief power is not in studious prayer is, to that extent, a man who does not know his business. Prayer is the minister’s business.” Our pastor, Richard White, takes prayer seriously. He knows that to do the work of ministry he must both be in prayer and have other people praying for him.

If the pastoral leadership takes prayer seriously, that will set the stage for the church to become a praying church. But if the pastor does not take prayer seriously, it will be much harder for the congregation to move into the powerful “common prayer” that Martin Luther described.

If you are a layperson, pray for your pastor to become a man or woman of prayer. Offer to pray for them and, if appropriate, with them. If you are a pastor, ask God to teach you how to pray. Most likely he will drive you into the wilderness, where you will learn to despair of your own abilities and come to know the necessity of prayer.

Vision Comes From Prayer and Drives the Church to Prayer

Several years ago our pastor and elders started praying for a clear vision for the church. At the leading of the Holy Spirit they spent a weekend at a mountain retreat center praying for fresh vision. There a vision was conceived and birthed in the leadership of the church. This took the form of a written vision statement that was brought before the congregation. This was, in part, “a people called by God to declare the praises of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit...”{EN3}

After the vision was shared with the congregation, the church determined to move forward to fulfill the vision. With this came the strong recognition that in our own strength it would be impossible. The vision conceived in prayer now called us to do some birthing prayer in the midst of the congregation. Pastor Richard expressed it well one day: “You know we have an excellent vision statement, but it is not going to get off the paper it is printed on unless there is a great deal of prayer. I know I can’t make it happen. Only God can.”

{EN3} In crafting the vision statement, first the elders chose 1 Peter 2:9–10 as a statement of their identity as the church of Jesus Christ. The rest of the vision reads as follows: “In response to His gracious invitation, we covenant together to be a people called by God to declare the praises of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit: in worship and prayer, individual and corporate; in works of compassion, evangelism and discipleship; in leading our children into the covenant of grace by loving and faithful witness; in renewing the Church and its institutions; in sending the Church into the world as salt and light; in challenging everyone to wholehearted obedience to God and His Word; in humility seeking reconciliation and community, in the love of Christ, within the Montreat Valley and beyond.

To cultivate a praying church, it is necessary to have received a vision from God, which will drive the leadership and eventually the congregation to prayer. A visionless church will often be a prayerless church—and a prayerless church does not receive a vision from God.

The challenge that faces many congregations is how to break through a cycle of prayerlessness. A catalytic event may take place that drives the church to prayer—such as a called prayer event or a natural disaster. At other times, a single intercessor or prayer group may catch a vision of the necessity of prayer—and then start to pray.

Learning to Follow the Holy Spirit

For a church to grow in the work of prayer it must be willing to be led by the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, prayer becomes simply a matter of rehearsing our own needs and agendas. This is why church prayer meetings often become so boring that people quit attending them. But with the Holy Spirit, prayer becomes an adventure of exploring new frontiers of cooperating with God.

In his Lectures on Revival, Charles Finney insisted on this point. Following the leading of the Spirit, more than anything else, was what made prayer meetings exciting and productive:

Great pains should be taken both by the leader and others, to watch narrowly the motions of the Spirit of God. Let them not pray without the Spirit, but follow his leadings. Be sure not to quench the Spirit for the sake of praying according to the regular custom....

An ill-conducted prayer meeting often does more hurt than good. In many churches, the general manner of conducting prayer meetings is such that Christians have not the least idea of the design or the power of such meetings. {EN4}

Many congregations do not know how to be led by the Holy Spirit. They have never seen it modeled for them and are terrified of letting go of control. Here again the pastor is usually either the one who ignites participation with the Holy Spirit or quenches it.

Our pastor has been a spark plug. This goes back to his own deep hunger to grow in intimacy with Jesus Christ and in usefulness to his kingdom. About a year ago at a Dunamis Project retreat, he prayed that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, to be more empowered to pastor the church. As the group prayed for him, he received no outward signs but simply received the Spirit in faith. Later Richard noted the following change:

Ever since the group prayed for me at Dunamis, my preaching has changed. Preparation time has become more of a fellowship with God, and I have a sense of expectation when I step into the pulpit. I can't wait to preach, to see what God is going to do. I know it's the Holy Spirit who does his work through me to proclaim the glory of Christ.

I observed a new power and freshness in Richard's preaching. I noted something else as well. He was better able to discern what the Holy Spirit wanted to do and let the Holy Spirit lead. During Sunday worship Richard realized that the Holy Spirit was giving invitations to the congregation to actually experience what was being preached. Our services would often end in an altar call or an invitation to pray or in some way to act on the word that had been preached.

One Sunday I was invited to bring a report to the congregation about the issues facing an upcoming General Assembly. I was to speak five minutes and then offer a prayer for the Assembly. This was the traditional way of prayer in our church. Prayer was always done by the up-front leadership, not by the people in the pews. As I spoke, I felt the Holy Spirit saying to me, "You are not to pray afterwards."

Richard soon confirmed this word: "I don't think you are supposed to pray. God has something different in mind!" Then he turned to the congregation and invited anyone feeling the Holy Spirit's leading to stand up and pray for the Presbyterian Church (USA). This represented a risky releasing of control to the Holy Spirit. Person after person stood and offered heartfelt prayers to God, asking him to send repentance and revival to our denomination. These individual prayers received softly spoken "amens" and other signs of agreement from the rest of the congregation. This was the "common prayer" that Martin Luther urged the church to engage in. It had not been in our bulletin but had been inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. The pastor's role had been to take a risk, giving people permission to obey the leading of the Spirit.

The People Respond to the Call to Intercession

Sometimes the Holy Spirit directly invites people to intercede for a leader. One Thursday morning as I was driving to my office, I felt the Lord say, "Pray for Richard. He is struggling to write his Sunday sermon." Ever since that morning, the call has been upon me to pray for him. Others in the congregation have received the same leading of the Holy Spirit to intercede for Richard and his family.

At other times the pastor will receive the guidance to ask others to pray for him. The apostle Paul did this. His letters usually conclude with requests for prayer for his protection and empowerment to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One Sunday Portia, Richard's wife, was extremely frustrated with her junior high Sunday school class. The students not only showed no interest in God but were also resistant and disruptive. This crisis eventually birthed a prayer group of three to ten people during the Sunday school hour

that intercedes for the teachers and students. Part of the success of this meeting is that the pastor is there praying with the intercessors.

In observing the way the Holy Spirit was leading the church more and more into the work of prayer Richard reported:

I felt that this prayer covered our Sunday school hour, but what about the worship service? I then had the idea of randomly inserting twenty prayer guides into the morning worship bulletin. In these we instructed the people to stay where they were and simply pray for the congregation through each part of the worship service. Included in this prayer guide were instructions for praying for revival and for the church's vision. Church members found this to be a new way to participate in the work of prayer during worship and were quite excited.

A little later the Lord provided further guidance that prayer teams were also to be in a back room during the service itself, and then to be available to pray for people after or during the worship service.

This work of prayer led by the Holy Spirit has been a real strength for a number of us, most of all me as the pastor. It has required trusting the Holy Spirit and the people. To do that I found I have had to give up the role of controlling everything and become a nurturer of the people's engagement with the Holy Spirit. These efforts, however, were preparation for the Holy Spirit's invitation to keep going deeper in our cooperation with him in the work of prayer.

An Invitation to Go Deeper Into Prayer

The prayer at Montreat has contributed to an atmosphere of expectancy that God will work. One Sunday he did—in an unexpected way. Richard had been preaching through the book of Acts. He had preached on how the early church was a church of prayer and how their prayers had shaped history. Many of us in the congregation felt the Holy Spirit powerfully present. Richard concluded the service with this invitation; “Do you have a hunger to know the power of God? Do you have a hunger to pray like they did in Acts and then see God at work? I do! I yearn for this level of engagement with God with all my heart. If you want to grow in prayer, then come back to church tonight at 5 o'clock and let's see how the Holy Spirit leads us.” One could feel the excitement! At 5:00 p.m., even though it was a lovely early summer evening, about thirty people showed up, eager to embark on an adventure of prayer.

Why one more meeting? Richard explains:

As the group gathered, I was looking out over the people. More had come than I had expected. I was thinking, “Lord what are we supposed to do now? What is your purpose in calling us together?” As we started to wait on the Lord in prayer,

Portia received a word from the Lord: “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 with groans that words cannot express” (Romans 8:26). As she read these words I sensed that God had spoken to us to give us the purpose of the prayer meeting. We were to let the Holy Spirit pray through us according to his agenda and not ours. The purpose of this meeting was to learn to “pray in the Spirit.”

How Do We Pray As Led by the Holy Spirit?

Then began the struggle! Just how does a group of Christians listen together to the Holy Spirit and then pray according to his direction? Most of us had no idea how to do this. We found

ourselves quickly falling into our habitual patterns of prayer and not listening to each other or to the Spirit. The excitement wore off in a few weeks, and we had to learn some difficult lessons in self-discipline to avoid some of the bad habits mentioned in chapter 2. Thus far we have found a few things helpful in fulfilling the Romans 8:26 way of praying as led by the Holy Spirit.

1. We found that we needed some recognized structure to guide us through the process of prayer. So we started using the flow of “praise, thanksgiving, confession, silent listening to the Spirit, petition, intercession, and then return to praise.” Having this framework helped people know what to say and when. This has not been rigidly enforced; sometimes the Holy Spirit would lead us only to pray prayers of petition, at other times prayers of intercession. The Holy Spirit is free to lead us into departures any time.
2. We found that the leaders needed to teach and model prayer led by the Holy Spirit. Richard would teach on this way of praying, share some experiences, and model it out. He was honest in letting us all know that he was a student in the school of prayer, but he often took the risk of trying to be led by the Spirit. He helped the rest of the group begin to listen and to risk by doing it himself.
3. We learned to pay attention to how the Holy Spirit was leading the whole group. This required us to pay attention to each other’s prayers. We had to learn to recognize the Holy Spirit when he was speaking either in the depths of our hearts or in someone else. This required more teaching on the rules for discernment. It has also required debriefing afterwards on what happened at the prayer meeting. Then everyone would analyze the flow of the meeting and honestly asking one another whether we were on track with the Holy Spirit. As Richard puts it:

I found that my role as pastor was not necessarily to have all the answers, but rather to facilitate the process of discernment. I have had to learn to listen and to realize that the Holy Spirit may be speaking to the least member of the group rather than to me. At times this has been a real blow to my pride. I find that I can facilitate corporate discernment by asking such questions as, “What is Jesus speaking to your heart? What burden do you sense? Does anyone have guidance about the direction the Holy Spirit may be leading?”

Even as I (Brad) was writing this chapter, our church had a prayer time in which we experienced Spirit-led prayer, prayer that we believe is shaping the future. That evening, I personally came with a burden. It was a sense of evil related to the 1998 terrorist attacks against United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. I had stayed up late, compelled to pray God’s light and power into the darkness of the Islamic fanatics who had declared Holy War against the United States. I did not know whether this was my personal prayer burden or whether it was for the whole group.

When we started to pray, the prayer was mostly popcorn style—prayer petitions jumping in unrelated directions. It seemed like people had to unload their own burdens to the Lord before they could really listen to what the Holy Spirit wanted us to do. Finally about midway into the meeting, someone started to pray for the African and American families who lost loved ones in the terrorist attacks. When they did, I felt the Spirit say, “Now share what I have been calling you to do.” So I took the risk and told the group that I felt we were called to pray against some impending evil. Others confirmed this, so we were able to come into agreement as a group for an extended season of intercession.

But then one person, right in the middle of this growing intensity, started to pray for a church member. It felt completely out of the flow of what the Holy Spirit was doing. The group sensed

that the person was out of order and brought the flow back to where the Holy Spirit wanted it. (Sometimes this requires intervention by the prayer leader or pastor.) By the end of the evening, we all knew that we had been used by God to shape the future in prayer in some way. We left the meeting exhilarated, even though we didn't know exactly how God answered our prayer.

The Results of Prayer at Montreat Presbyterian Church

The result of these prayer efforts has been a decisive change in the church's atmosphere. We experience God's presence and reality more fully. There is the expectation that God will speak and act in our midst. The preaching has been biblical, Christ-centered, and right to our hearts, and the worship has deepened. A practical expression of God's working in our midst is that the church grew by thirty percent last year. Another indication that something exciting is happening is that several hundred more people have been attending Sunday worship than are on our membership roles. We have had to move to two Sunday services because we are outgrowing our sanctuary. The greatest result of this prayer is not the numbers, but that Jesus Christ is being actually experienced as the Lord of the church.

How Prayer Shaped a Church

"Common prayer" has also deeply affected my own congregation. I (Doug) was called to Richmond, Virginia, fourteen years ago to be an Apollos and to water a church that another man had planted (see 1 Corinthians 3:5-8). This distinct calling from the Lord in 1985 pulled me from a relatively thriving church in Oregon to a small, troubled church at the other end of the country.

Its founding pastor had started this church five years before. For several years, Christ Presbyterian Church had met in the gymnasium of an elementary school. There it grew and prospered. Then our presbytery invited them to move into an abandoned church facility in a different part of town, which they could rent until they were able to purchase it.

This seemed like a good plan. Yet from the moment they moved into this facility, they began to have problems. The spirit of joy and peace that had characterized this "charismatic" Presbyterian church flew out the window. There were arguments, then controversies, and then a terrible split. Shortly thereafter, the pastor left, and most of the people were scattered to other churches, leaving behind a small cadre of wounded stalwarts—the ones who now invited me to be their pastor.

When I arrived, I noticed an inexplicable heaviness that hovered over us whenever we came together for worship. This heaviness was so thick it caused me to want to run away, just as many others were doing. From the first day I set foot in that building, I didn't feel good about the place. It seemed dark and unfriendly. I thought the building needed brighter light bulbs.

Immediately, I learned several things about that property. First, several other pastors had tried to build a church there for over twenty-six years, but none had succeeded. The church that had originally occupied the property disbanded and gave the property back to the presbytery, mostly unpaid for. The presbytery, of course, was hoping that we would pay for it. Yet, there were those who were convinced that a church could never succeed there. Moreover, I also learned that a Masonic Lodge was located adjacent to the church.

A Desperate Struggle

Fresh from a prayer battle against the Rajneeshpuram cult, I was excited about the power of prayer to win victories for Jesus. However, few others in the congregation wanted to pray much. They were all tired and discouraged over the struggles of the last three years and did not want to struggle anymore, either in prayer or in any other way.

I soon felt as they did. As the months dragged on, I often dreamed about leaving that church to go somewhere else where I would not have to struggle. For three years, we lost members. Since we had started out with only forty, every loss was a major catastrophe, especially when the big givers left.

The spiritual struggle I faced in Richmond made the prayer battle against the Rajneeshies look tame by comparison. (Incidentally, several other pastors who have since come to Richmond from other pastorates around the world have said similar things. Here they have run into hardships and heaviness of spirit the like of which they never had to fight anywhere else.) For three years, nothing I did for this little church seemed to stop the hemorrhage of people who wanted to leave. At heart, I understood that I was simply to keep on praying and that I should labor in poor soil for a while, trusting God for the outcome.

Seedlings Poke Up Above Ground

After three years, God sovereignly began to lead young people to this congregation. Many were from the campuses of Richmond universities, though we were not located near any of these campuses. Many of these were young ladies, who expressed one day the desire to have more young men come to the church. I said, “Why don’t you pray for some young men?” and they did.

Soon, some young men began to visit the church. Within a year or two, we began to have weddings—six or seven a year, beginning in 1991. These young people formed families, got jobs, had children, and attracted more young families to the church. In time, our congregation was in a pattern of stable growth. However, students are notoriously poor, so we were still in financial crisis.

Early in 1991, I was teaching at a PRRMI Dunamis Conference at Lake George, New York. A pastor who knew nothing about my church prophesied that God was going to remove our financial struggles. The next Sunday a woman visited our church from our neighborhood. She said that she had never been to a church before, but that God had called her to become a committed Christian and had told her that she needed to tithe her income. Therefore, she came to our church because she was looking for a place where she could give her tithe. This is the only time I can remember when anyone came to my church looking for a place to tithe. God used her to confirm the prophecy I had just received in New York.

That month our income doubled from the previous month, not just because of this woman, but because God was fulfilling his promise. From that day to this, our church has had enough for the work of ministry, even to the point of sending teams onto the mission field almost annually. I tell this story to demonstrate how prayer to invite God to shape our areas of activity works.

Whose Land Is This?

Once a solid growth pattern had been established, I began to talk with the presbytery about purchasing the property from them. You would have thought that the presbytery would be more than happy to have a Presbyterian church take over a failed and vacant church facility that was of no use to them. But inexplicably, mysteriously, I began to have opposition from people I had

never met, people who avoided me, working behind the scenes to prevent the property from being sold to our congregation.

Not only was this opposition inexplicable to me, it was also inexplicable to many others in the presbytery, who came to me in private and apologized for what seemed to them uncaring behavior. I knew that our church had made mistakes in its relationship with our presbytery, but almost the entire church was now made up of different people. My explanations, however, fell on deaf ears.

After two years of battling, the presbytery representative who had been trying to secure this property for us came to me with tears in his eyes and said, “These people just don’t want you. Maybe you should leave our denomination and join some other one.”

The problem with his suggestion, however, was that God had called us to labor in this Presbyterian church and to remain within the denomination. In fact, it was just at this time that he was leading us to begin the denominational prayer efforts at General Assembly; leaving the denomination simply could not have been a part of that strategy. Sensing that the enemy was trying to get us to leave the denomination, we refused.

We tried to keep speaking the truth in love as best we could, even visiting our Presbyterian opponents in their offices to hash things out and to try to understand where they were coming from. My wife and I continued in prayer, and in prayer sought to overcome our personal resentments against those who opposed us. Bitterness can be a terrible poison to our prayer life and to any vision from God, so we kept trying to practice the basic pattern of “faith working through love.”

The Next Prayer Battle

Those who had opposed us finally relinquished the property to us after three years of struggle. However, the opposition of certain presbyters was only a part of a total pattern we saw more clearly during the next phase of the takeover of this property.

We had been renting the church manse to a family as an extra source of income for the church. But by 1996, the church had grown to the point that we needed the manse for office and classroom space. We therefore asked the renters to vacate and began to make plans to remodel the manse.

From the moment we began to actually remodel the place, however, the people who had agreed to do the work began to have inexplicable problems. A carpenter wanted to contribute his time, but then his boss required him to work long hours, so he could not do the work on the manse. Another carpenter in my church took his place—and was promptly fired by his employer, for whom he had worked for decades. His wife immediately ran into problems with her job, too, so that both were suddenly unemployed at the same time. Other volunteers got sick. The list of harassments grew longer and longer and are too numerous to list here. But it became obvious that we were being opposed “not [by] flesh and blood, but [by] the rulers ... the powers of this dark world and ... the spiritual forces of evil” (Ephesians 6:12). You would think that remodeling a house would be a simple matter, but for us it was like walking against a driving rain in a hurricane.

After several months of struggle, we completed the remodeling work, much of it done by myself. But when I moved my office into the remodeled facilities, nothing worked properly. Especially frustrating was the heating system.

At last, I became so frustrated by the failure of all our efforts to claim this property for the Lord's use that my wife and I decided to have our morning prayer time in these newly remodeled offices. We picked up our songbooks and Bibles and had our entire two-hour prayer time over there rather than in our home. We cried out to God at the top of our lungs, with all the energy of frustration that had been building up over months of hard work. It was as Martin Luther once described about God in his inimitable German way:

He does not give what the saints seek on the surface of their hearts and with that foam of words, but He is an almighty and exceedingly rich Bestower who gives in accordance with the depth of that sighing. Therefore He lets prayer be directed, grow, and be increased: and He does not hear immediately. For if He were to answer at the first outcry or petition, prayer would not increase, but would become cold. Therefore He defers help. As a result, prayer grows from day to day and becomes more efficacious. The sobbing of the heart also becomes deeper and more ardent until it comes to the point of despair, as it were. Then prayer becomes most ardent and passionate....

Light Dawns

As we did this, the light dawned on why we had had so many problems in this church from Day One. We were fighting a territorial spirit, somehow connected with Freemasonry. This spirit had maintained its dominion over this entire region and did not want to give up its hold to a bunch of Christians. Apparently this spirit had blinded us to its actual presence. Diverse struggles began to fit together into a pattern:

- A history of failed attempts to build churches at the same location
- The sudden difficulties the church encountered as soon as it moved to this property
- The heaviness we had to fight off every time we came to worship
- Unloving relationships that provoked increasing spite and bitterness between church members and the presbytery
- The clear opposition toward our remodeling project
- The frustration in getting things to work properly on the new section of property

Any one of these difficulties could have been explained naturally, but combined into a pattern, we saw that we were fighting unseen principalities and powers. How do you fight what you cannot see? By prayer.

We stormed the gates of hell, because we suddenly saw that we had entered a city that had been occupied by evil spirits, and the promise of Jesus was that the gates of hell could not prevail against the church. We bound the hindering spirits in Jesus' name. We specifically addressed the spirits associated with Freemasonry and the worship of the so called "god" Ja-ba-la.

It was as though a great breakthrough was happening in our spirits. We felt lighter, as though God were near. He gave us ideas about how we could get the heating system to work—and soon we had it working. It was not so much that the system was haunted by gremlins as that a cloud of confusion seemed to have hindered us from seeing what we needed to do. Now, both confusion and heaviness lifted away from us. Those prayers, which we prayed in January of 1997, created a spiritual breakthrough for the manse and, to some degree, for the church.

The victory of that prayer also led to an increase of common prayer throughout our church. Within a year, for example, our early Sunday prayer team that gathered to pray for our Sunday ministries had tripled in size. The result of this increase of common prayer, in turn, has had a dramatic impact on our Sunday worship services. The presence and joy of God more consistently

monopolize our services, lifting us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. We are now at the point of aggressively moving against Freemasonry in prayer walks. We would like to see the place closed down and occupied for Christian ministry, as the Rajneeshpuram property has been.

What we have seen in this experience is that prayer confronts spiritual powers that are blocking the fulfillment of God's vision and are keeping churches from prospering. Nothing else has power to make much difference when it is a spiritual problem that afflicts a church. We believe that many churches are afflicted with spiritual problems that merely mask as conflicts, factions, fear, or immorality among leaders. Until they address these problems in prayer, they will not see a release.

From these two practical examples, Montreat Presbyterian and Christ Presbyterian, we can see how churches may do the work of reality-shaping prayer. God has called all churches to be "a house of prayer for all nations." As we respond to this calling, God will expand our "area of activity" to include not only our local congregation, but also the citywide church in our region and our denomination, if we belong to one. Further, he will take us into missions.

It is surely this prayer challenge that Martin Luther was referring to when he wrote:

In both the spiritual and the temporal realms the very greatest works in the world—even though they are not recognized and acknowledged as such—are continuously performed by Christians. Among these works are the destruction of the devil's realm, the deliverance of souls, the conversion of hearts, victory, the preservation of peace in the land and nation, help, protection, and salvation in all sorts of distress and emergencies. All this, Christ says, is to come to pass through the Christians, because they believe in Him and derive everything from Him as their Head.... Therefore it may all be called the Christians' works and wonders, which they perform until the last Day.

Summary

Many churches have lost the concept that God brings them together primarily to be a "royal priesthood"—to pray. There is a unique calling that Jesus gives to congregations that he gives to no one else—to learn how to pray together. If this is to happen, the pastor must see the vision and pray it into his or her congregation. The congregation must learn how to discern the leadings of the Holy Spirit, and the pastor must be willing to give up control to the Holy Spirit. Often, churches do not experience freedom from chronic problems until they learn to do this.

Vision and Prayer

Lesson # 10

The Dunamis Course #3 *The Power of Prayer*



Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International

Introduction

Throughout scripture and church history, God has given men and women visions of particular ways God wishes them to participate in God's work in the world.

Abraham, Moses, Nehemiah and the prophets all undertook humanly impossible tasks because they were fired with a vision of a new reality given by God. Jesus embodied this vision of God's Kingdom and passed it on to Peter, John, Paul and the others who followed. It was a vision that inspired St. Augustine, John Calvin, St. Teresa of Avila, Hudson Taylor, D. L. Moody, Corrie Ten Boom and a great host of other shapers of history.

Without vision there would have been no salvation history, no church, no great works of mercy, no reformation, no missionary enterprise, no advancement of the cause of Christ.

In this final lesson we will explore the role of vision and prayer. This is for visionaries and for these called to follow a visionary

1. Vision as the General Ability of Humankind

Because we are created in the image of God, we are able to have visions. We are artists who are shapers and creators of reality. This is how God created us in order to enable us to exercise dominion over all creation.

G.K. Chesterton saw art as a sign of our being made in the image of God. We are different from all other creatures because we are creators.

This ability to vision and then implement these visions has resulted in the vast diversity of human achievement and culture. And because of the fall into sin, this ability has also resulted in the evil distortion of God's good creation.

2. Vision and the Christian

As Christians, Jesus has reconnected us with God. We are able to receive and implement visions of the Father's redemption of creation. This cooperation of God and humans is how God originally designed us to create and exercise dominion. So how does this work?

a. Co-workers with Jesus

Jesus commissions us.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." John 20:21.

3. Vision – The Primary Way We Cooperate with God

Then the Holy Spirit gives us visions.

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. (Acts 2:17-18)

4. The Nature of Christian Vision

These visions give the practical shape of how the Father wishes to express His presence, love, grace and power in the world at a particular time or place.

Our salvation comes from being born again into the Kingdom of God. Jesus is our savior. Our work comes from being subjects of God's Kingdom. Jesus is our Lord.

"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to walk in." Ephesians 2:10.

Vision is God's way of letting us know the particulars of those good works which we were designed to do.

5. How do you receive vision?

Vision is a gift from God. You may ask and prepare for a vision, but ultimately you simply need to wait until it is God's time. This is an expectant waiting with open hands and open hearts.

6. Withdrawal and Return

One way to prepare for a vision is to retreat from the world. Withdrawing from the world gives room for us to grow in intimacy with God through prayer. In this time of closeness, God may give us a vision. After having seen a heavenly vision, we return to shape earthly reality according to the vision.

Jesus' Withdrawal and Return

After being baptized with the Holy Spirit in the river Jordan, Jesus was driven into the wilderness. There, withdrawn from the distractions of everyday life, Jesus sought intimate communion with God. In the wilderness, the Father gave Jesus clarity for his vision. He was also tested by Satan. Jesus returned from the wilderness full of the power of the Holy Spirit and began the fulfillment of His vision declaring, *"The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news."* Mark 1:15.

My experience of withdrawal and return. This withdrawal and return happened to me 40 years ago when I was in the midst of an around the world tour with a singing group. On a break between London and Spoleto, I took 3 days to fast and pray, traveling to Assisi, Italy, the town of St Francis, since it was close to Spoleto. On the third day of the fast, sitting on a mountain overlooking Assisi, reading a biography of St Francis, I received a vision that was to become my life's call. It was to *"go and rebuild my house for it has fallen into ruin."* It was a call to church renewal. This call to serve came while I had withdrawn from the world. Free from the busy circumstances of my tour, my friends, even my meals, I had room for God to speak to me. I was all ears.

One way to prepare to receive a vision is to withdraw from the world.

7. God breaks in

Very often vision comes while we are in the middle of something else. Yahweh interrupted Moses with a burning bush as he was shepherding his sheep on the far side of the Sinai desert. Or David when Samuel called him in from watching his sheep. Or Peter as he was praying in the roof before lunch.

8. Vision caught from Another Visionary

A vision may be caught through another visionary. Elisha caught his vision from Elijah. At the death of Elijah, Elisha picked up the mantle of his master and carried on his vision of bring Israel back to Yahweh. The apostle Paul conferred his vision of ministry to the Gentiles to Timothy, as well as Silas and Titus and Luke and many others. The point is that God can lead you to a visionary where the purpose for your life fulfilled.

Caution: A person with a vision can be very compelling and persuasive with communicating the importance of their vision. Be sure to carefully discern if God is calling you to be a part of fulfilling their vision. Don't just get swept up in the heat of the moment. Seek the counsel of close spirit filled friends before joining in on another's vision.

In the words of Frederick Buchner, "When the world's great need meets your deep gladness, you will have found your calling."

9. I Think I Have a Vision. Now what?

If you believe you have received a vision what next?

a. Discerning the Source of the Vision

Treat the vision like any other communication from God. Discern the source of the vision. There are other sources of vision besides the Holy Spirit. Since we are created in the image of God, we can form our own visions. Also, the devil can dress up as an angel of light and try to convince us to follow a counterfeit vision.

When you get a vision apply the 4 rules of discernment that we learned in DP2.

1. *Does the vision bring glory to Jesus Christ in the present and in the future?*
2. *Is the vision consistent with the intentions and character of God as revealed in scripture?*
3. *Do other born again, Holy Spirit-filled believers have a confirming witness?*
4. *Is there confirmation in objectively verifiable events or facts? Be sure the vision passes all four tests.*

b. Preparation of the Visionary for the Vision

Often God will reveal his vision for you long before you are ready to fulfill the vision. A young believer will often move to fulfill the vision in their own strength and on their own timetable long before they are ready, long before God wishes them to begin.

The bible is full of examples of this impetuosity. After the apostle Paul was baptized and healed by Ananias, he attempted to fulfill his vision in his own strength and stirred up so much trouble that the apostles sent him home to Tarsus. Paul then went through years of preparation, including a season in Arabia being disciplined by Jesus, before he was ready. Finally, Barnabas retrieved him to begin fulfilling his vision discipling the first Gentile/Jewish church at Antioch, the church that later launched Paul into his missionary journeys throughout the Gentile nations.

Moses knew he had a call to lead the Hebrews, but when he first attempted to lead, he killed an Egyptian and was run out of town. It was only after 40 years in the desert that God called him to fulfill the vision for his life. Moses needed those long years as a shepherd in the Sinai to prepare him to shepherd the Hebrews through the same desert.

Even Jesus at 12 years old left his parents to begin his ministry in the temple courts. He knew he was the Messiah, but the Father required Jesus to wait another 18 years before beginning his public ministry.

My example. As for me after I received my call to go and rebuild God's house, God opened the door for me to begin rebuilding actual houses for the poor in Atlanta Ga. After six months of carpentry, I thought I was ready. I attempted to transform one of the houses I was working on into a place of ministry. I got the owner to agree, and even got a partner, Fritz. God then closed the doors. I was not ready. As it turns out, I had another 14 ½ years as a carpenter before God released me to go full time into Christian service rebuilding the church.

After you receive a vision, be prepared for an extended period of preparation.

10. Fulfilling the Vision

a. Praying the vision into reality.

Prayer should be integral to preparing for a vision, confirming that the vision is from God, making it through a season or seasons of preparation. Once God opens doors for you to fulfill the vision, continue to pray.

Remember the Moses/Joshua dynamic. Seek intercessors to help you pray the vision into reality. Fulfilling a vision is a partnership between you and God. Prayer is essential.

b. Obey God. Step Out.

Obedience. Follow what guidance you have received. This includes guidance you received from your intercessors. You don't have to know the whole plan, just the next step.

God's vision is not a picture of what shall be but what God would like to be. Without our cooperation through prayer and obedience your vision will remain a dream not a reality.

In his defense before King Agrippa, Paul declared that he *"was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."* Acts 26:19-20. Paul fulfilled God's vision for his life through many years of steady prayer and obedience.

c. Death of a vision

Often circumstances will conspire to bring an end or a seeming death to a vision. This ending comes from many different circumstances. Some are outside the control the visionary. Others are from someone involved in the fulfillment of the vision. Or the end may come from a personal or professional failure of the visionary. This ending is extremely frustrating and disheartening. The one with the vision will often question God. "How could you have let this happen? This work was for your glory?" Or question themselves, "I am a failure. The purpose of my life will never be fulfilled." Or question others, "I cannot trust the church, or her leaders."

Like the wilderness, this is a time that deeply tests our faith. It is a time for reflection, often for repentance. It could be that the vision was so captivating that it was becoming an idol, a source of validation more important than family, more important than God. It could be that the visionary

was proceeding ahead of God, not letting the Holy Spirit guide. Like Jeremiah seeing the potter remaking a pot that had become marred in his hands. Most often it's a mix of things that need purging.

In this crucible of circumstances, the visionary needs to continue to cling to God, to cling to his promises. To declare, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*" Job 13:15. To let the heat of the crucible bring up the impurities, so God can skim them away, refining you and your faith and your vision, To stay with God and believe that "*The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me*" Psalm 138:8 ESV.

Remember David, anointed as king over Israel, running for his life from King Saul. Job sitting in ashes, his children dead, his fortune depleted, his health ruined. All these withstood the time of trial, and by doing so, were better prepared to fulfill God's vision for their lives. Remember our faith is based upon the hope in the resurrection of the dead. This includes God's vision for our lives.

Conclusion

This lesson brings us to the end of the 3rd Dunamis Course, *Prayer that Shapes the Future*. We have talked about the basic ingredients of prayer, the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer, asking in the name of Jesus, how God answers prayer. We've talked about seasons in the wilderness, intercession, nurturing prayer in the local church and finally, prayer and vision.

How to conclude such a rich and varied feast? I will say to you what I always say to a new pastor or a new church leader when they come to my neighborhood in downtown Seattle, eager to advance the kingdom of God, "Remember to say your prayers." More, remember to ask others to pray for you. For prayer is the privilege of engaging with the Father for a release of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Practical Exercises for Prayer and Discussion:

Listening Prayer—Time with God Alone

Invite God to reveal his vision for the part of his Kingdom into which he's calling you to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to advance the Kingdom of God. Record your vision, then share and submit it to a mature Christian to assist you in discernment. Then begin to pray that vision into reality.

Discussion Points—In your small group

1. How has Jesus called you to be a friend and co-worker, since you became a Christian?
2. Describe any experiences you may have had, of withdrawal from the world in order to hear from God. What led to your setting that time apart for that? How did God reveal his heart to you during that time?
3. Briefly share with those in your discussion group any vision you sense God's given you. Discuss how that vision relates to the advancement of His Kingdom.
4. Discuss the relationship between obedience and both receiving and fulfilling vision.
5. Describe a situation in which you "caught from a visionary" God's vision or the enthusiasm for what God was doing to fulfill vision. Discuss ways in which we can make ourselves more available to receive vision.

Prayer Exercise:

Split into pairs. Ask each other if there has been any disappointment arising from a vision unfulfilled or frustrated? Pray for discernment: What is God teaching you through this hard experience? Does God wish for you to re-engage with the vision, or to let it go?

For the week ahead:

- Since we're created in the image of Creator God, all humans have the capacity to be creative beings. When the Holy Spirit takes up residence when we become believers, our capacities for creation and dominion are restored to their original purposes. Reflect on your own creativity since becoming a Christian and ask God for opportunity, clear vision and direction, as well as the empowerment of his Holy Spirit, to use those capacities for his purposes and glory.
- Reflect on any blocks you sense within you to the fulfillment of the vision God's given you. Share those with a mature Christian friend as you invite the Holy Spirit to remove those blocks.

“Now What?”

The next Dunamis Course is “The Healing Ministry of Jesus”. This course introduces you not only to learn about how Jesus healed, but how you and your church can participate in this exciting, and life changing reality that advances God’s Kingdom.

For the complete set of video and written lessons go to www.dunamisnw.org