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DEEPENING THE PRAYER LIVES OF LAY LEADERS AT
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH SEVIERVILLE, TENNESSEE

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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December 2023

APPROVAL SHEET

DEEPENING THE PRAYER LIVES OF LAY LEADERS AT
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH SEVIERVILLE, TENNESSEE

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Defense Date: September 27, 2023

For the glory of God and the edification of His church

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PREFACE

I could not have completed this journey alone, and there are several people to thank for their investment in my life and support of this project. First, the Lord himself has graciously provided the wisdom and strength I needed during my studies over the past several years. I rejoice in his abundant grace that made it possible for me to persevere.

Second, there are many people who invested in me as disciple makers throughout my life. I am thankful for the family that raised me and for the pastoral influence of my grandfather, Tom Wells. Teachers, ministry leaders, and pastors like Dr. Chester Jones, Dr. Randy Davis, Al Hood, Dan Geijer, and Carol Moss have made a profound impact on my life. I am eternally thankful for my childhood pastor, Travis Stiles, who invited me to call on the name of the Lord to be saved as a child during Vacation Bible School. The leaders and dear members of First Baptist Church in Andrews, North Carolina, shaped my faith forever.

Third, this project would not have been possible without the generous support of First Baptist Church in Sevierville, Tennessee, and Senior Pastor Dan Spencer. The people of First Baptist have been good to me and encouraged me along the way. It has been my honor to serve that great church for nearly two decades.

Fourth, I am thankful for the professors who have taught and helped me throughout this process. My project supervisor, Dr. Joe Harrod, greatly helped me deepen my own prayer life and the prayer lives of those impacted by this project.

Finally, I cannot begin to say how much I owe to the support and patience of my incredible wife, Jessica, and our two amazing sons, Luke and John Thomas. It is an indescribable joy to be their husband and father.

My hope is that this project will glorify God as it equips lay leaders in the church and other believers to deepen their prayer lives. May the Lord be exalted as we call on his name in prayer.

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Sevierville, Tennessee

December 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Faithful prayer has been an essential element of the church’s spiritual health since its beginning. The biblical account of the first church in Jerusalem was that “all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14).¹ Faithful prayer has also characterized the lives of individual Christians throughout the ages. John Bunyan, in his work *A Discourse Touching Prayer*, writes, “Prayer is an ordinance of God, and that to be used both in public and in private; yea, such an ordinance, as brings those that have the spirit of supplication, into great familiarity with God.”² Prayer is key to intimacy with God, as Bunyan asserts, and intimacy with God is key to the spiritual health of churches like First Baptist Church (FBC) in Sevierville, Tennessee, and its members. Without it, FBC cannot fulfill its mission of “helping people move from their point of need to hope in Christ.”³ Growth is needed in this area at FBC. As with every church, growth in prayer must begin with the leadership. To foster that growth, FBC aims to deepen the prayer lives of its lay leaders.

Context

FBC has made some progress over the past decade toward becoming a church that prioritizes prayer, but there is still a need for improvement. For example, Sunday evening prayer services that began in July 2020 were initially well attended. On July 12,

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

² John Bunyan, *I Will Pray with the Spirit, and I Will Pray with the Understanding also, or, A Discourse Touching Prayer, from 1 Cor. 14.15*, 2nd ed. (London: 1663), 3.

³ “Mission and Vision,” First Baptist Church Sevierville, accessed July 21, 2021, <https://sevier.church/mission-and-vision>.

2020, the attendance was 132, or 17 percent of morning worship attendance. In the following months, however, attendance quickly dwindled. By the Spring of 2021, that number dropped to approximately 60, or 6 percent of morning worship attendance. As a result of declining participation, the church decided to only offer worship services on one Sunday night per month, and those services are not focused on prayer. This example, among others, suggests the need to deepen the prayer lives of every FBC member beginning with the leadership. Those leaders include deacons, Life Group leaders, and leaders of the various FBC ministries.

In 2013, FBC's Senior Pastor saw a need to develop a greater prayer culture at FBC. As a result, he created a new Equipping Pastor staff position to help lead FBC toward that goal, and I took on that role. Since then, the church started various prayer initiatives that have shown some promise but have yielded little visible impact. These initiatives included a couple of sermon series to equip members in prayer combined with a forty-day call-to-prayer emphasis. The staff scheduled these at strategic times in the church year to maximize the number of people participating. These were well received at the time but did not seem to make a lasting impact in the church's commitment to prayer. The church also offered a few short-term classes on prayer with a few members attending who were already prayer leaders in the church. In the morning worship services, prayer is included, but it is a minimal part of the service. This was magnified by having to shorten services during the COVID-19 pandemic to allow time for cleaning between the three morning services. Though there has been some recent interest by a few new members and existing deacons, overall participation in the church's intercessory prayer room remains low with usually just a couple of people serving on any given day. The prayer room has numerous open one-hour slots for volunteers to fill that have remained empty for years. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the staff also began a Facebook Live prayer time, but an average of only 20 people join in each week. While some individuals have grown in prayer over the years through these ministries and efforts, overall the church still falls

short of being a church that prioritizes prayer.

Besides these realities, the church recently launched an ambitious 10-year vision for the future that will require a greater commitment to prayer. The vision grew from a realization that the growth of the church is not keeping pace with the growth of the community. It involves a two-fold plan. The first part is to establish a Life Group in a home or business within a ten-minute drive of every person in Sevier County. These Life Groups will be small discipleship gatherings that meet throughout the week in addition to the existing Sunday morning Life Groups on the church campus. The second part of the vision is to build a ministry village that addresses growing problems and needs in the community like hunger and homelessness. Both parts of the vision align with the church's mission statement of "helping people move from their point of need to hope in Christ."

Making this vision a reality will require equipping and deploying scores of new leaders and volunteers in addition to raising millions of dollars for facilities and operations. Considering the enormity of such a task, the church leadership has recognized a need to grow in dependence on God in prayer. If prayer is not integral to the life of each leader and to the ministry of the church, there is potential for all the activity taking place to be done in the flesh and not yield eternal fruit that glorifies God.

The temptation for a larger church like FBC with a long, rich history is to depend on its own size and resources instead of personally and corporately depending on God in prayer. The church's pastors and leaders have acknowledged that fulfilling its vision will call for something beyond mere human wisdom and skill. It will require God's wisdom and strength found only in prayer. Prayer, however, is not merely a tool for FBC to accomplish its vision. It is an essential part of what it means to be a faithful church regardless of plans for the future. Therefore, this ministry project will seek to address the primary issue of deepening the prayer lives of lay leaders at FBC.

Rationale

Because FBC's efforts over the past decade to elevate the role of prayer in the church have fallen short, a fresh approach is needed, and it must begin with the leadership. As previously mentioned, preaching on prayer, offering special prayer services, and other ministry efforts had some impact but still did not create a culture of prayer in the church. Because church practice and culture are shaped by leadership, FBC must seek to help its leaders deepen their personal prayer lives. Those leaders who are trained to make prayer central to their lives will be better equipped to make prayer central in whatever area of the church they serve. Rather than prayer leadership coming just from the pastors, lay leaders such as Life Group leaders, deacons, and ministry heads will influence those they lead on a weekly basis.

As this project seeks to deepen the prayer lives of lay leaders, it is not breaking new ground. God's people have always been people distinguished by prayer. To do otherwise is to miss an essential part of what it means to trust and obey the Lord. The Bible records that from the time surrounding Enosh's birth, "people began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen 4:26). The Old and New Testaments demonstrate numerous examples of Israel and the church going to God in prayer. Moses met with the Lord face to face (Exod 33:11). Hannah prayed for a son (1 Sam 1:11). King David cried out to God in thanksgiving and supplication (2 Sam 7:18-29). Throughout the book of Acts, examples abound of the early church praying followed by mighty acts of the Lord. They prayed for boldness and the ground shook and the church spoke with boldness (Acts 4:31). After Jesus's ascension, Christ's followers "with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). The Pauline Epistles also command the church to pray steadfastly and continually (Col 4:2).

The apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy highlights the primacy of prayer in the life of the church. First in the order of his instructions on church life is the command to pray. He writes, "First of all, then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and

thanksgivings be made for all people” (1 Tim 2:1). He goes on to write, “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Tim 2:8). The biblical mandate for the church to be a people of prayer is clear. The church’s leaders are those who have the most influence in deciding how prayer factors into the ministries they lead. Equipping them to deepen their personal prayer lives will establish the centrality of prayer in their own lives so that they may carry it into the life of the church.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to deepen the prayer lives of lay leaders at First Baptist Church in Sevierville, Tennessee, by offering an eight-session course to provide theological and practical training.

Goals

To effectively equip FBC leaders in the spiritual discipline of prayer, the following three goals were met in progression. The process moved leaders from gaining an awareness of their current prayer practices to completion of a course that equipped them for greater faithfulness in prayer.

1. The first goal was to assess the current personal prayer lives of FBC lay leaders.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum that will equip leaders to grow in their personal practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer.
3. The third goal was to deepen the personal prayer lives of FBC lay leaders.

To successfully meet these three goals, a specific research methodology was designed that will be explained in the following section. All the research instruments used in this ministry project were performed in compliance with and approved beforehand by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these three goals. The first goal was to assess the current personal prayer lives of FBC lay leaders. This goal was measured by administering a written assessment of personal prayer practices through a survey and interview questions.⁴ The assessment measured the participants' habits regarding personal prayer. This goal was successfully met when seventeen FBC leaders completed the assessment, allowing analysis of their personal prayer habits.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum that equipped leaders to grow in their personal practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer. The curriculum covered biblical teaching on prayer and offered practical tools for growth in prayer. This goal was measured by an expert panel, consisting of four different pastors, who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical accuracy, teaching methodology, scope, and practical application of the curriculum.⁵ This goal was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to deepen the personal prayer lives of FBC lay leaders. This goal was measured by administering the prayer survey⁶ again within one week following the final session of the course. This goal was successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions are key terms that were used in the ministry project:

Spiritual discipline. A spiritual discipline is a biblical practice, such as Bible

⁴ See appendix 2.

⁵ See appendix 1.

⁶ See appendix 2.

meditation or prayer, that fosters spiritual growth in a Christian.⁷ As Donald S. Whitney writes, “They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times.”⁸

Prayer. This project relied on John Bunyan’s definition of prayer as “a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or, according to the Word, for the good of the Church, with submission, in Faith, to the Will of God.”⁹

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the surveys before and after the course depended on how candid the participants were willing to be about their personal prayer practices. To mitigate this limitation, surveys were conducted anonymously. Second, success of the course was hindered by participants who missed one or more sessions due to illness, schedule conflicts, or other reasons. To mitigate this limitation, complete class notes and a time for questions was offered to those who missed.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, the course was only offered to recognized leaders at FBC such as approved deacons, Life Group leaders, and ministry leaders. This allowed for focused equipping of members who can in turn influence those they lead in their various ministries. Second, the course was limited to eight sessions over four weeks. This allowed enough time to cover all the needed material while not going longer than the church leaders were able to commit to attend.

⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 4.

⁸ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 4.

⁹ Bunyan, *I Will Pray with the Spirit*, 4-5.

Conclusion

A deep and faithful practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer is essential to the Christian walk and the health of the church. The following chapters show how the Bible and examples from church history can equip the modern believer to pray. Chapter 2 demonstrates how the Bible can be used as a guide to deepen prayer through passages such as Matthew 6:5-15 and Psalm 51. Chapter 3 explains how examples and teachings from the Puritans and their theological heirs help equip the modern Christian in his or her own practice of prayer. Chapter 4 outlines the details of the ministry project. Chapter 5 offers an evaluation of the project.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR
USING THE BIBLE AS A GUIDE TO DEEPEN
PRAYER

The Bible provides abundant guidance to every believer seeking to deepen his or her prayer life. Both the Old and New Testaments are full of examples of prayer and teachings on prayer that provide a framework to approach God in worship, thanksgiving, confession, and supplication. This chapter will examine two Bible passages that have helped believers throughout the centuries build a framework for their own prayer lives. While these two passages are by no means the only ones useful for deepening one's prayer life, they are a solid foundation to build on. First, the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 deepens prayer by providing an overall structure that teaches every believer how to address and petition God regardless of circumstances. Second, King David's prayer in Psalm 51 deepens prayer more narrowly by providing a model for confession of sin and repentance. Together, these two passages are instructive for helping believers deepen their prayer lives.

Using the Lord's Prayer to Deepen Prayer

Throughout the history of the church, Matthew 6:9-13 has been a foundational passage for those seeking to deepen prayer. This passage and the surrounding verses record some of Jesus's most well-known teachings on prayer including this example prayer commonly known as the Lord's Prayer. In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Grant Osborne notes that some have argued that this passage could be more accurately titled "The Disciple's Prayer" because it is specifically given for the disciples' instruction for how to pray. This prayer stands in contrast to Christ's prayer to the Father

recorded in John 17, which could more appropriately be called “The Lord’s Prayer.”¹ For the purposes of this project, however, the more common title of the Lord’s Prayer will be used. As Jesus Christ’s primary instruction on how to pray, it equips believers to deepen their prayer lives by providing a foundational framework for addressing and petitioning God. It is specific enough to reveal the true nature of right praying, yet general enough to be used in any circumstance. Ancient patristic church teaching reveals that some of the earliest Christians were taught to pray the Lord’s Prayer three times per day.² Though the familiarity of the Lord’s Prayer to some believers may cause them to doubt its value for deepening their prayer lives, a careful examination of the text will demonstrate its value in helping believers more faithfully call upon the name of the Lord. Medieval Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas believed in the value of the Lord’s Prayer for deepening prayer, writing that it “excels in the five conditions requisite in prayer: namely, assurance, rectitude, devotion, order and humility.”³ In other words, the Lord’s Prayer gives the believer confidence in what they are praying, knowing that it is a prayer from God that is pleasing to God in form and content. Each of these aspects will be illustrated below in the examination of the text.

Before examining each word and petition of the Lord’s Prayer, it is helpful to know its overall context in the Gospel of Matthew.⁴ The Matthean version of the prayer is part of an extended teaching commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount covers a variety of subjects including avoiding hypocrisy in any kind of righteous act, rejection of wealth as a master, and a command not to worry about

¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 226.

² Didache 8:3, in *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. H. De Romestin (London: Parker and Co., 1885), 75. Internet Archive.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *The Three Greatest Prayers: Commentaries on the Our Father, The Hail Mary, and the Apostles’ Creed*, trans. Laurence Shapcote (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1956), 1.

⁴ A similar, more abbreviated version of this prayer occurs in Luke 11. In that passage, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray after they ask him to teach them how to do so.

one's life. The sermon begins in Matthew 5, and then in Matthew 6 Jesus turns his attention to the matter of prayer. He first issues a warning to avoid praying in a hypocritical fashion seeking the praise of others. Praying on the street corner only to be seen and praised by others will not be rewarded by God (Matt 6:5). Prayer of this kind has no interest in seeking or pleasing God. It is merely a religious performance with self-serving motives. Jesus teaches that such an individual will have already received their only reward, which is the admiration of others who value such displays (6:5). On the contrary, an individual should enter their room, shut the door, and pray to the Father "who is in secret" (6:6). He also warns them to avoid babbling in prayer like the Gentiles. They believed that praying in this way would cause God to hear them. Jesus teaches that, on the contrary, the abundance of empty words in prayer is unnecessary, "for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (6:8). In contrast to these manners of praying, Jesus provides an alternative. He begins his instruction by teaching his disciples to address God as their Father in heaven.

Deepening Prayer through Addressing God as Our Father in Heaven (Matt 6:9)

How a believer addresses God at the beginning of a prayer is foundational for what follows. Who God is and the nature of his relationship with his people directly affect how his people approach him. Therefore, Jesus introduced his teaching on prayer by telling his disciples to "pray then like this" (6:9), beginning with addressing God as their Father in heaven. While not every prayer must follow Matthew 6 in its exact wording, this passage serves as a model in content and form for any prayer a believer may offer. Jesus's model was to come to God as his Father in heaven. This opening address highlights two areas of emphasis. First, God is Father, indicating that prayer should be both relational and reverential. Second, God the Father is in heaven, uniquely situating him as eternal God who is worthy of worship.

Before addressing these two aspects of the opening address, it is worth noting that Jesus specifically taught his followers to address God as “Father” rather than some other name or title such as “Lord” or “God.” Addressing God as “Father” was Jesus’s own practice in his prayers that are recorded throughout the four Gospels with the exception of his cry from the cross recorded in Matthew 27:46.⁵ While the concept of God’s fatherhood was not totally foreign in the Old Testament (Isa 63:15-16), his fatherhood becomes central in the New Testament to the prayers of Christ and his example prayer for his disciples.

This emphasis on the fatherhood of God sets the tone for prayer from the beginning as a relational and intimate act. The true God to whom his children pray is not distant or uncaring. He hears, loves, and cares for his children. Osborne writes,

Abba brings in the centrality of relationships, the intimacy between father and children; we share Jesus’ sonship in his special filial relationship to his Father. When we pray, we pray in the certainty that our Father is hearing us, the one who loves us so deeply and watches over us. There is a whole new intimacy and reverence in our prayer life.⁶

Eighteenth-century Baptist pastor John Gill also highlights how addressing God as Father introduces the two elements of intimacy and reverence in prayer. In his classic work, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, Gill details the theological significance of praying to God as Father. He begins by noting that calling God “our Father” evokes a reverence for God, as his children approach him with “reverence and godly fear; not with slavish fear, as a servant but with filial fear, as a son.”⁷ In other words, appropriate fear of God in prayer is not defined as being terrified of God’s coming

⁵ This exception is a quotation of Ps 22:1 rather than an extemporaneous cry to God. Not only did Jesus instruct his followers to call God their Father, but he also modeled it repeatedly in his own praying. The words of Jesus’s other prayers include those recorded in Matt 11:25; 26:39, 42; Luke 10:21; 23:34, 46; and John 11:41-42; 12:28; 17.

⁶ Osborne, *Matthew*, 227-28.

⁷ John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity; or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for W. Winterbotham), 1796.

judgment as a slave might fear his master's retribution. Rather, when a relationship between father and child is healthy, that child possesses a certain respect and reverence for his or her father. In contrast to a more flippant attitude some believers may adopt in prayer, remembering this aspect of fatherhood can deepen prayer by restoring a sense of reverence.

In addition to godly fear, Gill cites six other ways that God's fatherhood impacts praying.⁸ First, if God is Father, stating this truth can create an atmosphere of freedom to approach God without reservation. While prayer is reverential, there is also freedom to cast every care and burden upon God because he is a loving Father who cares for his children and invites them to pray. The believer who sincerely regards God as a loving Father will not be reluctant to mention their deepest fears or concerns. Gill also notes that God's fatherhood invites boldness in prayer, confidence that God will not deny what his people need, and a posture of gratitude and submission to God's will. A child who trusts their father on earth need not be shy in approaching him or doubtful that he will do what is best. Finally, Gill writes that praying to God as "our Father" directs his children to pray not only for themselves but for others also. In other words, there is a communal focus in the opening address of the Lord's Prayer in contrast to calling God "my Father." When a believer prays, whether with the church or alone, there should always be a view toward asking God to work in the Christian community at large. This aspect of the opening address helps deepen prayer by reminding believers that their relationship with the Lord is a personal relationship that exists in the context of the church. Whatever a person prays in the pattern of the Lord's Prayer, they pray not only for themselves but also for others.

In addition to addressing God as Father, Jesus taught his disciples to call on him as the Father who is "in heaven." By recognizing that the Father is in heaven, the one

⁸ Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 3:365.

who prays recognizes that though God is intimately near, he is still the almighty God over creation. This perspective helps create an atmosphere of reverence and worship in prayer. William Hendriksen notes that the words, “our Father in heaven,” also magnify the identity of those who pray as being exiles in a foreign land. He explains, “They make the Father’s children feel that they are pilgrims here below, and that their real home is not here but in heaven.”⁹ This reality of being sojourners in a foreign land deepens prayer by giving those who pray a greater focus on God’s kingdom rather than earthly kingdoms. In sum, believers can deepen their prayer lives by following Jesus’s teaching to pray to “our Father in heaven.” Praying in this way helps them see that they are praying to a God who is worthy of worship as the sovereign God of heaven who wants an intimate relationship with his children as a loving father.

Deepening Prayer through Petitioning God to Hallow His Name (Matt 6:9)

Following the opening address of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught his disciples to pray “hallowed be your name” (Matt 6:9). This first petition, closely linked to the following two petitions, helps believers deepen their prayer lives by helping them consider God’s holiness in everything they pray.¹⁰ As J. I. Packer writes, “This petition, then, asks that the praise and honor of the God of the Bible, and of him only, should be the issue of everything.”¹¹ Believers who begin their prayers with this petition and this aim may be able to overcome the uncertainty of how to pray because all of their praise, thanksgiving, confessions, and petitions are framed by a pursuit of regarding God’s name

⁹ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 327.

¹⁰ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 148. Hagner notes that the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer and the following two are closely linked in theme and in syntax. He argues that all three are linked to the “fulfillment of the promises to Israel, and thus to the silencing of the taunts of her enemies.” He also notes that the verb in all three petitions is aorist passive.

¹¹ J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 171-72.

as holy. Packer continues, “God’s chief end, purposed in all that he does, is his glory (and what higher end could he have?), and he has so made us that we find our own deepest fulfillment and highest joy in hallowing his name by praise, submission, and service.”¹² In other words, though this first petition is centered on God, its residual effect is a deep sense of purpose and joy for believers as they join God in his ultimate mission of bringing glory to himself. Osborne adds that the stress on God’s holiness in the first petition has a two-fold outcome in prayer: “that God will make his holiness manifest throughout the world, and that we will honor his name in everything that we do.”¹³

Accordingly, praying “hallowed be your name” is implicitly a declaration by the believer to live in a manner worthy of the gospel bringing glory to God. It is a commitment to believe and obey the words of 1 Peter 1:14-16: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Those who grow deeper in their prayer lives pray for and share God’s passion for his name to be hallowed in their own lives and in the world at large.

When praying for God to work in such a way that his name is hallowed, one should understand what is meant by “name.” In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Leon Morris explains that names in biblical times had more to do with a person’s being and character than they do today: “We use it for a personal designation, and that is about all. But in antiquity the name was held to be bound up with the person in some way; the name and the qualities associated with the name went together.”¹⁴ Therefore, when believers pray for the Father’s name to be hallowed, they are praying not just about the name but about who the name represents. It represents all that he is in his

¹² Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 174.

¹³ Osborne, *Matthew*, 228.

¹⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 144.

glory and perfections. Gill writes that God’s glory and perfections can be seen in everything that he does, whether it be creation, providence, redemption, holiness, or justice.¹⁵ Deeper prayer delights in reflecting on the manifold glories of the eternal God whose name is holy.

Morris concludes that this petition “expresses an aspiration that he who is holy will be seen to be holy and treated throughout his creation as holy.”¹⁶ Believers who aspire to deepen their prayer lives should pray for the Father to hallow his name in themselves and in all creation. This petition is the framework for all other petitions and certainly the two petitions that follow it in the Lord’s Prayer.

Deepening Prayer through Petitioning God to Advance His Kingdom (Matt 6:10)

The second petition of the Lord’s Prayer is “your kingdom come” (Matt 6:10). David Turner writes that this petition, along with the first and third petitions, leads believers to ask for the Lord’s eschatological reign over themselves and all people.¹⁷ Augustine, in his letter about prayer to a widow named Proba, writes, “When we say: ‘Thy kingdom come,’ which shall certainly come whether we wish it or not, we do by these words stir up our own desires for that kingdom, that it may come to us, and that we may be found worthy to reign in it.”¹⁸ This petition, therefore, deepens prayer by creating a longing in the believer’s heart for the reign of God over themselves and all things both now and in the future. As people surrender to God’s reign, the petition for God’s name to

¹⁵ Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 3:366.

¹⁶ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 145.

¹⁷ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 187. Turner sees the first three petitions as different ways of asking the same thing. He writes, “God’s name represents his person and character (BDAG 712), God’s kingdom is the earthly imposition of his character, and God’s will flows from his character.”

¹⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *Letters of St. Augustin*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 465.

be hallowed is fulfilled.

As with each of these first three petitions, there is a sense in which it is already being fulfilled and a sense in which fulfillment lies in the future. R. T. France explains, “The ‘already-not-yet’ tension which underlies the Synoptic uses of the term is vividly illustrated by the doxology later added to the end of this prayer, which requires the disciples who have just prayed that God’s kingdom may come to declare immediately afterward that it is already a reality.”¹⁹ Jesus Christ, the Messiah, came into the world as the promised son of David who would reign on David’s throne forever. After his death, burial, and resurrection, he ascended into heaven to reign from his throne in heaven. He will come again one day to establish his eternal reign in the new heaven and new earth. Praying for God’s kingdom to come deepens prayer by helping believers surrender to his kingship now and look forward to his kingship in the age to come.

Praying for the kingdom to come is also an implicit commitment to participate with God to see his kingdom come through the missionary task. An individual does not recognize Christ as king until they have heard the gospel and repented and believed. Declaring the gospel among unreached people is God’s means to advance his kingdom in this age, but the mission must begin with God’s people asking God to bring it to fruition. When it does come to fruition, the believer is encouraged to continue this prayer as they see God at work. The inner transformation that takes place when God’s kingdom comes becomes evident through “true and lasting betterment in individual, family, social, national, and international conditions.”²⁰ As Packer notes about the effect of God’s kingdom arriving, the reality of God’s kingdom is that it is a kingdom of grace “where the damage done to us by sin is repaired; and the gospel of grace proves to be what the

¹⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 246.

²⁰ Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 330.

kingdom is all about.”²¹

While the kingdom may be a kingdom of grace, the nature of kingdoms is that where one kingdom exists another cannot. Therefore, God’s kingdom coming naturally requires individuals to abdicate power to him. Martin Luther, in *A Simple Way to Pray*, reflects this reality in how he instructs his friend to pray for God’s kingdom to come:

O dear Lord, God and Father, thou seest how worldly wisdom and reason not only profane thy name and ascribe the honor due to thee to lies and to the devil but how they also take the power, might, wealth and glory which thou hast given them on earth for ruling the world and thus serving thee, and use it in their own ambition to oppose thy kingdom. They are many and mighty; they plague and hinder the tiny flock of thy kingdom who are weak, despised, and few. They will not tolerate thy flock on earth and think that by plaguing them they render a great and godly service to thee. Dear Lord, God and Father, convert them and defend us.²²

The kingdom of God faces fierce opposition as the world opposes the work of the church, but as the believer prays for the kingdom to come, God is able to defend his people and spread his rule. As the Puritan pastor William Perkins writes, “The spread of God’s rule is the means by which God’s name is hallowed such that God cannot be glorified until he rules in the hearts of his people ‘by his word and Spirit.’”²³ Indeed, as believers continue to pray for God’s kingdom to come, they may pray specifically for the preaching of his Word to have its intended effect in the hearts of men and women as the Spirit of God moves and brings sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Deepening Prayer through Petitioning God to Accomplish His Will (Matt 6:10)

The third petition of the Lord’s Prayer is “your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). Packer argues that this phrase sums up the true essence of prayer:

²¹ Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 177.

²² Martin Luther, “A Simple Way to Pray, 1535,” in *Devotional Writings II*, Luther’s Works 43, ed. Helmut Lehmann, trans. Carl Schindler (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 195.

²³ William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Lord’s Praier in the Way of Catechisme* (Edinburgh: Robert Walde-Graue, 1593), 6.1, ProQuest.

“Here more clearly than anywhere the purpose of prayer becomes plain: not to make God do my will (which is practicing magic), but to bring my will into line with his (which is what it means to practice true religion).”²⁴ Prayer, according to this view, then, is not about changing God’s mind to things he has not previously desired to do. It is, rather, to change the mind of the person who is praying to come into conformity with God and his will. In one sense, God’s will is revealed in Scripture because it makes clear how men and women should believe and live in order to please him. Therefore, with Bible in hand, praying this petition deepens one’s prayer life by bringing the believer into direct alignment with God’s plans for his people and the world. For example, Jesus commissioned his disciples before his ascension to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19). With this truth in mind, believers can pray for God’s will to be done by praying for people to be obedient to take the gospel to the nations and for God’s wisdom and strength for themselves to make disciples. In sum, every decree of God found in Scripture can be prayed back to God with an assurance that one is praying in direct alignment with God’s will.

As previously mentioned, this petition and the two that precede it are closely linked. Turner notes, “These three petitions are essentially one expression of burning desire to see the Father honored on earth as he is already honored in heaven.”²⁵ To ask for God’s will to be done is in some sense the same as asking for his kingdom to come and for his name to be hallowed. Genuinely praying for God’s will to be done deepens one’s prayer life by turning the heart of the believer toward a God-centered mindset. With such a mindset, the one who prays with an aim to accomplish God’s will will be in fellowship with God and pray and live in a way that pleases him.²⁶ Pleasing God, it should be

²⁴ Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 179.

²⁵ Turner, *Matthew*, 187.

²⁶ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 148-49. Hagner sees this petition along with the first two not only as requests for God to work but also a commitment for the disciples to be involved in that work. He adds,

mentioned, is something that the saints who have already died and entered the Lord's presence, plus the angels, are able to do perfectly. They do so in heaven. This is the aim of those praying saints on earth who have not yet passed on.

Another aspect of this petition that helps deepen the believer's prayer life is its eschatological hope. Osborne notes, "At present we cannot introduce his perfect will and lead the people of this world to embrace it. But we can proclaim his name and guide those around us to follow his will more fully. This will prepare for its finalization in the future, when God intervenes in world history to lead his creation to his completed will."²⁷ As believers pray the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, they prepare themselves and others for this future reality. They also are ready to be God's answer to the prayer by being obedient.

The first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer direct believers to make God the priority in their prayer. The next three petitions of the Lord's Prayer maintain this priority by depending on God for provision, forgiveness, and protection. In the second half of the prayer, the personal pronouns shift from second person singular to first person plural. Jesus, here, will begin to teach his disciples to pray correctly by helping them to see their own needs in light of God's will. When a believer's focus is first on glorifying God, then the way he or she prays about a need or problem will naturally have a God-glorifying end. In sum, these first three petitions direct the believer to prioritize the "promotion of God's reputation, the advancement of God's rule, and the performance of God's will."²⁸ The next three will honor God's name by depending on God for what only he can do.

"There is thus a sense in which the first three petitions of the prayer are also a prayer that the disciples will be faithful to their calling, that they will do their part (in obedience), not to bring the kingdom but to manifest its prophetic presence through Jesus and the Spirit."

²⁷ Osborne, *Matthew*, 228.

²⁸ Turner, *Matthew*, 187.

Deepening Prayer through Petitioning God to Provide Daily Needs (Matt 6:11)

The fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer is "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt 6:11). Some believers may be reluctant to pray for basic daily needs, thinking it is a selfish request, an unspiritual request, or believing themselves to be self-sufficient. Praying this request, however, demonstrates God's desire for his people to trust him for daily physical needs. This petition deepens the believer's prayer life by helping them depend on God for all their basic needs.

Though the meaning of this petition may seem plain to the casual reader, theologians have debated the meaning of the word ἐπιούσιον in the original Greek language, translated "daily" in the ESV. Osborne outlines four potential meanings: "necessary for existence," "for the current day," "for the following day," and "for the coming day."²⁹ Among these options, he favors the second and third interpretations, citing the Jewish practice of praying in the morning for the current day's bread and in the evening for bread for the following day.³⁰ Hagner argues, however, for a position that includes the eschatological (the fourth option) and is in line with the prayer for God's kingdom to come. He writes, "The prayer thus asks for the present realization of the blessing of the eschaton. The prayer is nevertheless a prayer for bread. And there is a sense in which the bread (by synecdoche, 'food') we partake of daily is an anticipation of the eschatological banquet."³¹ Though an eschatological meaning may lie behind the words of this petition and the three before it, the more central force of the text seems to be about provision of physical needs for the present day. God's people, instead of

²⁹ Osborne, *Matthew*, 229.

³⁰ Osborne, *Matthew*, 229.

³¹ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 150. Hagner's view plus an ancient view that the bread pertains to the Eucharist all seem to go beyond the plain reading of the text. While it is possible that some spiritual or eschatological meaning of bread is intended, the plainer reading of the text seems to be that Jesus is talking about literal bread to meet physical needs. Of course, trusting God to meet physical needs rather than prideful self-reliance is a deeply spiritual pursuit.

worrying about daily provision (6:25), should instead trust God completely to provide for all physical necessities. This deepens prayer by leading believers to trust God in every aspect of their lives, no matter how mundane or worldly it may seem. Prayer is deepened when the relationship with God through Jesus Christ is deepened. That relationship flourishes when a believer depends completely on God not just for forgiveness of sins, but also for the evening meal.

It is important to note that in the modern Western world, many people have never had to wonder whether there will be sufficient food for today or the coming day. Unlike the manual laborers of Jesus's day (20:8), modern workers in the West are normally paid weekly or monthly instead of daily. Because many, if not most, have never had to go without, they live with the assumption that food and basic provisions are always available. Praying the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, however, reminds believers that such provision cannot be assumed. Kingdom seeking is commanded over and against worrying about daily needs (6:33); nevertheless, believers should recognize their complete dependence on God through this daily request.

Prayer is also deepened with this petition as believers also learn to recognize the difference between what is needed and greedy desires. The Lord may indeed bless his people with provision beyond what is needed, but the Lord's Prayer shows that believers depend on God for what they need in order to live and serve God. They do not use prayer as a means for the selfish, idolatrous pursuit of wealth. As Packer writes, "This petition does not sanctify greed! Moreover, we must as we pray be prepared to have God show us, by his providential response of not giving what we sought, that we did not really need it after all."³² God knows what we need and generously provides it as we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

³² Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 189.

Deepening Prayer through Petitioning God to Forgive Our Debts (Matt 6:12)

The fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer is “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt 6:12). Asking God for forgiveness deepens prayer by addressing the barrier of sin that is an impediment to effective praying (Ps 66:18). In other words, deeper prayer is characterized by an intimacy with God that results from a proper confession of sin. That relationship is hindered when sin goes unchecked and unconfessed.

Confession of sin and asking forgiveness links this petition with the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. Forgiveness of sin debt is an example of the way that God’s name is hallowed, his kingdom comes, and his will is done. In asking for forgiveness, the one who prays this petition recognizes that God is holy, and he or she is not in alignment with that holiness. The request itself is a sign that the one praying the fifth petition was genuine is bringing the first three petitions before God.

The Greek word ὀφειλήματα used in this petition literally means “debts,” compared with a different word used two verses later, which could be translated “trespasses” or “sins.” The parallel passage in Luke 11 also uses language that translates as “sins.” Hagner notes that whichever word is used, the same meaning is intended, with sin being viewed as a debt owed to God in Aramaic rabbinic literature.³³ Turner adds,

The nuance of sin as unfulfilled obligation paves the way for the expansion of forgiveness in terms of unmet human obligations in Matt. 6:14-15. When disciples pray for pardon, they recognize that they are not yet perfect—their attitudes and activities often fall short of kingdom standards (cf. 5:3, 6). Receiving this pardon is an amazing privilege, but it comes with a corresponding responsibility, extending pardon to others. A forgiven person is a forgiving person.³⁴

This passage is teaching that those who have truly experienced the forgiveness of God through faith in Jesus Christ cannot very well remain unforgiving toward those who have

³³ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 150.

³⁴ Turner, *Matthew*, 188-89.

sinned against them. Here and in verses 14 and 15, the idea is not that God's forgiveness is predicated on the prior forgiveness of others, as if forgiveness has been earned through righteous merit. Instead, the two actions are inseparable realities. A refusal to forgive others betrays a lack of understanding of the gospel itself, inhibiting believers from truly seeking and receiving forgiveness from God. Those who freely forgive others, however, can seek God's forgiveness understanding that forgiveness is grounded upon the grace and mercy of God through his Son Jesus Christ. Packer explains, "Those who hope for God's forgiveness, said Jesus, must be able to tell him that they too have forgiven their debtors. This is not a matter of earning forgiveness by works, but of qualifying for it by repentance."³⁵ Repentance is essential to salvation and a relationship with God. The fruit of repentance demonstrates God's willingness to forgive through forgiveness of others. Prayer is deepened when one's relationship with God is deepened. That cannot happen until sin is properly dealt with and forgiven in Jesus Christ.

Deepening Prayer through Petitioning God to Deliver Us from Evil (Matt 6:13)

The sixth and final petition of the Lord's Prayer is "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt 6:13). Though some commentators, like Hagner, take the second half of this and make it a seventh petition, it will be treated as one here.³⁶ After the assurance of being forgiven of the debt of sin, this final petition naturally turns toward the future struggle against sin and evil. The one who truly desires for God's name to be hallowed, as with the first petition, will be eager to stand firm when temptation comes again.

Turner notes that this final petition states the same sentiment first in a negative

³⁵ Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 193.

³⁶ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 151.

sense and then in a positive sense.³⁷ He writes, “Since the Spirit led Jesus into a time of testing (4:1), this petition is not so much for God not to lead the disciple into a moral test as it is for the disciple to be delivered from Satan so as not to yield to temptation.”³⁸ Gill, however, disagrees with the notion that the disciple is not asking God to not lead them to a moral test. He affirms that God does not tempt people so that they might sin (Jas 1:13), “yet there is a sense in which God may be said to lead into temptation, or there would be no occasion to deprecate it.”³⁹ Gill cites biblical examples such as Jesus Christ being led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit (Matt 4:1), and things “which, though good and lawful in themselves, yet meeting with the corruptions of nature, are incentives to, and occasion of sin: as the Babylonish garment, the shekels of silver and wedge of gold spied and found by Achan, were to him.”⁴⁰ So while God does not tempt, according to Gill’s interpretation, it seems from this petition that there is a sense in which God may from time to time lead his people to a time of testing where their faith and steadfast obedience may be tested. Turner addresses the difficulty here by affirming that “God permits evil to exist in the world and indeed permits his people to be tested, yet God is not to be blamed when humans fail the test, succumb to evil, and fall into sin.”⁴¹ Packer sees the force of this petition as asking God to not lead believers into times of testing even though these times are “God’s program for the spiritual education and growth of Christians.”⁴² The thought of these difficult times awakens in a believer a realization of the dangers that

³⁷ Turner, *Matthew*, 189.

³⁸ Turner, *Matthew*, 189.

³⁹ Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 373.

⁴⁰ Gill, *Practical Divinity*, 374.

⁴¹ Turner, *Matthew*, 189.

⁴² Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 196. If testing or “temptation” is for the good of the believer, this begs the question of why someone would pray for it not to happen. Packer gives three reasons: First, Satan tries to exploit these times to ruin us. Second, no Christians in his or her right mind would enjoy or welcome the suffering that accompanies such times. Third, humble believers realize how vulnerable and prone to sin they are.

potentially lie ahead and asks God to mercifully direct their path in another direction.

The second half of this petition does not create quite as much difficulty for interpretation. If the believer will remain faithful in the face of temptation or testing, he or she must rely on the strength and protection of God. God alone can deliver from evil. That evil may come from the world, the evil one, or the passions of the flesh (Eph 2:2-3). Turner notes that this request seeks to break the cycle of temptation, sin, and the need to ask for forgiveness of sin. He writes, “Prayer for protection from temptation and deliverance from the evil one’s strategies breaks the cycle.”⁴³ Therefore, a believer may deepen his or her prayer life by using this petition, because it leads one to draw near to God and depend on him completely for protection and deliverance. A closer walk with the Lord is realized when he is one’s fortress and strength.

Though the ESV and other modern Bible translations omit it, the church has traditionally concluded the Lord’s Prayer with a doxology that is found in some ancient manuscripts immediately following the sixth petition. In the Authorized Version, the end of Matthew 6:13 reads, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” The issue, however, is that this phrase is missing from the oldest manuscripts.⁴⁴ Morris points out that while the doxology may be missing from the most ancient manuscripts, it is found in variations and is referenced in ancient writings such as the *Didache* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*.⁴⁵ He writes,

But it may be argued that it is unlikely that a first-century Jewish prayer should conclude without a doxology and that its absence in many MSS may be because it was simply assumed, while in others it was explicitly included. On the whole it seems probable that it was a liturgical addition made early in the life of the church, but we should not regard this as certain. The case for the doxology is stronger than many students assume.⁴⁶

⁴³ Turner, *Matthew*, 189.

⁴⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 149.

⁴⁵ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 149.

⁴⁶ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 149.

Because the doxology is missing from the earliest manuscripts, the evidence suggests that it is likely a later liturgical addition. If this is true, then it should not be regarded as authoritative Scripture. It may, however, be used in prayers, as it has been for much of the church's history, due to its sound theological grounding. If used to conclude the prayer, it can deepen the prayer life of a believer by bringing their attention back to the beginning of the prayer. In everything, whether facing temptation or basic needs, believers pray to a Father who is Almighty God in heaven, worthy of worship and reverence.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus Christ gave his disciples a model from which to offer their own prayers to the Father. Six petitions that range from a desire for God's name to be regarded as holy to a humble request for daily provision provide a way to pray humbly yet confidently in any situation. Believers can use this model to deepen their own prayer lives by seeking in prayer to glorify God, align their own purposes with God's purposes, and depend on God for what only he can give—namely, provision, forgiveness, and protection against evil. What follows is a study of Psalm 51 to demonstrate how the penitential psalms, like the Lord's Prayer, can be used to deepen prayer by giving believers a framework to approach God for forgiveness of sins and restoration of fellowship with the Lord.

Using Penitential Psalms to Deepen Prayer

While the Lord's Prayer provides a comprehensive framework for deepening all aspects of prayer, passages like Psalm 51 help in a narrower sense. Psalm 51 can help believers express genuine repentance and confession before a holy God. Along with six other psalms, Psalm 51 is commonly referred to as a penitential psalm or psalm of confession.⁴⁷ It may also be classified as a psalm of individual lament, though it does not contain a complaint against an enemy or a request for God to defeat the enemy.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The other penitential psalms are Pss 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, and 143.

⁴⁸ Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of*

Regardless of classification, Psalm 51 helps believers deepen their prayer lives by giving a model for earnest confession of sin, petitioning for forgiveness and spiritual restoration, and a commitment to call others to repentance.

Deepening Prayer through Earnest Confession of Sin (Ps 51:1-6)

Psalm 51, according to the title, was written in the context of the prophet Nathan confronting King David of Israel in his sin.⁴⁹ The title states, “A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah killed. This account of David’s descent into one sin after another is recorded in 2 Samuel 11–12. Following the confrontation with Nathan, David simply replies, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam 12:13). Though David’s brief confession of sin in 2 Samuel may seem out of balance with the immensity of his sin, Psalm 51 counters this with an extended confession of sin, pleas for forgiveness and cleansing, and a commitment to call others to repentance.

The opening petitions of Psalm 51 introduce David’s confession with a longing for God’s mercy and cleansing from sin. The language of purification found here is repeated throughout the psalm. The first two verses state, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!” For believers overwhelmed by their sin and unsure where to begin in confessional prayer, these verses provide guidance.

In his commentary on the Psalms, Marvin Tate notes that confession has

Psalms, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 454.

⁴⁹ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, *Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 18. The title or superscription is part of the opening verses in the Hebrew text and not a later editorial insertion.

certain fundamental aspects, which are found here in these first two verses. Tate writes, “First, it must be directed to God, accepting the rightness of his judgment and his power to cleanse and forgive. Such confession presupposes full dependence on God and a gracious nature on his part. It also presupposes the divine power to cleanse from guilt.”⁵⁰ A recognition of God’s right to judge is essential to confessional prayer. As with the Lord’s Prayer, God must be recognized as holy and a desire for his name to be hallowed be present. While God is holy, holiness does not preclude his love and willingness to forgive. He is also gracious and merciful. The opening petitions are grounded on an appeal to these aspects of the character of God—namely that he is a God of “steadfast love” and “abundant mercy” (Ps 51:1). Knowledge of these unchanging characteristics deepens prayer by inspiring confidence in God’s willingness to forgive repentant sinners and his powerful ability to do so. His love is steadfast no matter how terribly his children have sinned. His mercy is abundant. It will not be exhausted by the depths of sin committed against him.

Those who pray, like David, to find forgiveness do well to recognize God’s great grace and mercy, which is ultimately made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The greatness of God’s mercy is needed due to the seriousness of sin committed against God. As Augustine writes, “Of my own so deadly wound I should despair, unless I could find so great a Physician.”⁵¹ John Calvin adds, “Therefore, after he had made mention of his mercy, he adds the multitude of his compassions; because it was no ordinary mercy that he had need of, being involved in so great guilt.”⁵² The magnitude of David’s guilt matched by the magnitude of God’s

⁵⁰ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary 20 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 30.

⁵¹ Augustin of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 1, vol. 8, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (New York: Christian Literature, 1888), 191.

⁵² John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Psalms of David*, vol. 2 (London: Printed by D. A. Talboys for Thomas Tegg, 1840), 56.

gracious character is seen in the abundance of words used for both. The trio of God's characteristics of grace, mercy, and love in verses 1 through 2 are joined by three different words for sin in verses 2 through 3—namely, transgression, iniquity, and sin.⁵³ In poetic fashion, the author is going to great lengths to emphasize the seriousness of his sin and the magnitude of forgiveness and restoration required to cover that sin.

In verse 4, David confesses that “against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.” Of course, David had certainly sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah and others, but this verse demonstrates the underlying reality of sin. It is ultimately an offense against a holy God. Seventeenth-century English clergyman Thomas Horton explains that “the sins which are committed against our brethren and neighbors, they are committed against God himself” because he is the giver of the law, the creator of all things, and Redeemer.⁵⁴ In other words, the law is God's law, so any sin that violates his commands is a sin against him. Also, as Creator, God has ordained his creatures to glorify him by living lives that are pleasing to him. The creature, when he or she sins, sins against the Creator. Finally, sins committed against brethren in Christ are committed against Christ himself as Redeemer. Psalm 51 begins by petitioning God alone for forgiveness and cleansing from sin. Those seeking to deepen their prayer lives through earnest confession must see their sin as a treasonous offense against a holy God who is righteous in judgment and gracious in forgiveness.

Deepening Prayer through Petition for Restoration (Ps 51:7-12)

In verses 7-12 of Psalm 51, David begins to center his petitions on the themes

⁵³ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 19.

⁵⁴ Thomas Horton, *Choice and Practical Expositions on Four Select Psalms* (London: A. Maxwell, 1675), 276.

of restoration and renewal. In verses 7 and 9, he asks once again for purification just as he did in verses 1 and 2. Verse 7 states, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Then in verse 9, David writes, “Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.” David knows that God has the power to cleanse him completely from his sin, no matter how heinous. Then, in verse 8 and verses 10-12, David seeks not only cleansing and forgiveness, but also complete restoration. In verse 8, David asks for joy, gladness, and rejoicing to return to his life once again. In verse 10, David requests a clean heart and a “steadfast spirit within me.” In verse 11, David hopes for the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, and in verse 12 he looks for a renewal of the joy of his salvation and God’s sustaining power.

A model for deepening one’s prayer life through asking God to restore what has been lost through sin is found in all the verses of this second section of Psalm 51. Sin robs the believer of joy and gladness and instead causes pain and suffering (Ps 38:1-8). Sin breaks the will of those resolved to honor God. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit. Only God can restore what has been broken. The one who prays for restoration from sin’s effects must realize that it is a work of God and not self-made. Tate writes, “The sinner cannot be self-restored. A divine work of re-creation and endowment is essential. Forgiveness involves a creative work: ‘Create in me a pure heart.’ This is not a creative work in the sense of creation-out-of-nothing, but a creative work in the sense of bringing order and peace where chaos and hopeless turbulence were before.”⁵⁵ Those who seek to grow in their knowledge of Christ can deepen their prayer lives by holding this vision of restoration to God’s original design for his people. It is completely a work of God by his grace. Calvin points out that David recognizes this truth with the wording of his psalm: “Notwithstanding, he confessed first by the word *create* that whether God beget us again from the beginning, or whether he set us upon our feet again when we are fallen,

⁵⁵ Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 30.

whatsoever uprightness is in us, it is his free gift.”⁵⁶ David’s hope is that the creative power of God and the sustaining presence of God will enable him to be steadfast in the future. Confession that moves beyond seeking forgiveness for sins past to seeking strength for temptations in the future, enables the believer to abide more completely in Christ.

Deepening Prayer through Commitment to Call Others to Repentance (Ps 51:13)

Following David’s confession of sin and petitions for cleansing and restoration, he goes one step further in verse 13. He writes, “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.” Considering the seriousness of David’s sin, a simple plea for forgiveness would seem enough, but David longs now to be used by God in calling others to repentance. In his explanation of Psalm 51, Tate notes that when God restores someone who has sinned, ministry is the natural next step. He writes, “Confession and forgiveness are always necessary as a prelude to mission. However, confession, without mission is abortive and ends in an apathetic spiritual state.”⁵⁷ In contrast to the danger of an “apathetic spiritual state,” David expresses zeal for the God-ordained mission ahead. He commits to what he will do—namely, he will teach transgressors the ways of God, and he is confident of the outcome. He declares that sinners will indeed return to God when they hear the invitation to repent.

Horton points out that the mission of teaching others does not necessarily mean preaching from the pulpit, but any believer can participate through their interactions with family, friends, neighbors, and fellow church members.⁵⁸ When a believer seeks to deepen their prayer life through confession, stopping at petitions for forgiveness and

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Psalms of David*, 68.

⁵⁷ Tate, *Psalms of David*, 31.

⁵⁸ Horton, *Choice and Practical Expositions on Four Select Psalms*, 404.

restoration falls short. God desires to use those he has redeemed in Christ to spread the message of Christ. As mentioned above, when a believer prays for God's name to be hallowed and his kingdom to come and his will be done, the believer is also committing to be an active answer to that prayer. In like manner, when a believer confesses his or her sin and is restored to a right relationship with God, the natural next step in prayer is to ask to be used in the lives of others who have rebelled against God.

In sum, Psalm 51 is a model for any believer who wants to deepen their prayer lives by getting serious about their sin before God. In the Lord's Prayer, the believer prays to be forgiven of sin debt. Using Psalm 51, the believer recognizes the magnitude of their sin debt and the magnitude of God's grace. From this position, they seek forgiveness, cleansing, restoration, and commissioning in the redemptive work of God through his Son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

The two Bible passages examined above are useful for helping believers deepen their prayer lives. The Lord's Prayer, as studied in Matthew 6, deepens prayer by leading believers to pray to God as Father, by aligning their hearts with God's purposes, and by teaching them to depend on God for everything from forgiveness to provision of daily necessities. Psalm 51, one of the penitential Psalms, deepens prayer by giving believers a model to confess their sins, seek God's forgiveness and restoration, and commit to call others to repentance. These two passages stand among numerous others that provide abundant guidance for deepening the believer's prayer life.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Beyond these two passages, a study of the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11:2-4 and other penitential psalms such as Pss 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, and 143 would provide further help for deepening one's prayer life in similar ways. These are in addition to the multitude of other passages that give examples of prayer (cf. Eph 1:15-19) and teach believers how to pray (cf. Col 4:2).

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR DEEPENING PRAYER

Believers can deepen their prayer lives by examining the teachings of earlier eras. The writings of Puritan authors from the seventeenth century provide abundant theological and practical content about prayer that is useful for the contemporary church. Such writings, many of which were originally sermons, are especially helpful resources because their focus is often on simple, biblical worship. Some historians argue that defining Puritanism can be difficult since it was not one cohesive political or church movement.¹ However, Kelly Kopic and Randall Gleason note a number of common spiritual traits that characterized most Puritans despite the variety of church affiliations, theological positions, and political views.² Puritanism was generally a movement of spirituality with a focus on experiencing communion with God, a dependence on the Bible and the Holy Spirit for spiritual guidance, an emphasis on Augustinian views of sin and grace, and a focus on spiritual revival.³ Regarding prayer, Puritans called for dependence on Scripture and the Holy Spirit rather than reliance on the prescribed prayers. While use of written prayers is not an issue for First Baptist Church Sevierville, there is a need among its leaders and members to deepen their prayer lives through reliance on the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Puritan teaching on this

¹ Patrick Collinson, "Puritans," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillebrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

² Kelly M. Kopic and Randall C. Gleason, "Who Were the Puritans?," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 23-34.

³ Kopic and Gleason, "Who Were the Puritans?," 31-32.

doctrine can help them grow in this area.

This chapter considers the Puritan contribution to a deeper prayer life by examining the writings of John Owen and Matthew Henry. First, this chapter examines Owen's theology regarding the importance of depending on the Holy Spirit in prayer. Second, it considers Henry's focus on the use of Scripture to teach believers to practice different types of prayer.

Depending on the Holy Spirit in Prayer

Contemporary believers who examine the works of John Owen (1616-1683) can benefit from his thorough, biblical treatment of the work of the Holy Spirit. His work will challenge them to develop a deeper prayer life by depending increasingly upon the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Owen's teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer is found in his 1682 treatise titled *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*.⁴ This treatise was among several others on the Holy Spirit.⁵ His biblical insights remain influential more than three centuries later. Sinclair Ferguson states that many historians agree that Owen was the premier theologian of the Puritan movement.⁶ Like other Puritan authors, Owen's teaching was influenced by his historical and ecclesial context.

John Owen's Historical and Ecclesial Context

Owen was born in England during a time when many ministers sought to further reform or separate entirely from the Church of England. During the tumultuous

⁴ John Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer with a Brief Enquiry into the Nature and Use of Mental Prayer and Forms*, The Works of John Owen 4 (1682; repr., Avon, England: Bath Press, 1967).

⁵ In 1674, Owen wrote *Pneumatologia: or A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, which extensively addressed the nature, roles, and ministry of the Holy Spirit. John Owen, *Pneumatologia: or A Discourse on the Holy Spirit* (London: J. Darby, 1674).

⁶ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 19.

years of his own ministry, circumstances led him to shift his ecclesiology from episcopal to presbyterian to congregationalist.⁷ In addition to the religious disagreements of his time, there was enormous political upheaval. The civil war in England and the demise, and subsequent restoration, of the monarchy took place during Owen's lifetime. In seventeenth-century England, political and religious changes were intertwined. Carl Trueman writes that with the return of the monarchy and the passing of the Act of Uniformity in 1662, Owen, like many others, was formally forced out of the Church of England.⁸

Owen's work establishes the necessity of prayer to the Christian life and the necessity of the Holy Spirit to prayer. According to Matthew Barrett and Michael Haykin, his work helped address a key issue of his day, which was the role of written prayers in the Christian life.⁹ Namely, what was the role of the state church's Book of Common Prayer in the life of a believer? Barrett and Haykin note, "While many of the Puritans saw no problem with using written prayers, a goodly number saw little need for them."¹⁰ Owen was among this number. His treatise uses Scripture to show that the Holy Spirit is the one who should guide believers in their prayers. Puritan Isaac Watts (1674-1748) also expressed this sentiment when he wrote, "The Spirit sanctifies us and fills us with love, and faith, and humility, and every grace that is needful in the work of prayer. Why then should men take so much pains to hinder us from praying by the Spirit when it is only by this Spirit we can walk with God, and have access to God?"¹¹ Owen wrote to demonstrate

⁷ Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 27.

⁸ Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, Great Theologians (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007), 4. The Act of Uniformity required use of the Book of Common Prayer and required episcopal ordination for all ministers, effectively expelling a large number of nonconforming ministers.

⁹ Barrett and Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life*, 233.

¹⁰ Barrett and Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life*, 234.

¹¹ Isaac Watts, *A Guide to Prayer: or A Free and Rational Account of the Gift, Grace, and*

how necessary and primary the Holy Spirit is in prayer.

In addition to the religious and political climate of Owen's day, his personal spiritual experience also shaped his writing and ministry. Because of his Puritan convictions, Owen had to leave his academic pursuits at the University of Oxford as a young man and take a position as a private chaplain. In 1642, at the outbreak of the English Civil War, he left his chaplaincy and moved to London where he heard a sermon from Matthew 8:26 by an unknown preacher. It was there that he received an assurance that he had truly been born again by the Holy Spirit. Barrett and Haykin write that this experience had enormous impact on Owen and his theology, leading to a life-long interest in the work of the Holy Spirit.¹² Besides prayer, he wrote extensively on the work of the Holy Spirit in various areas including the Holy Spirit's role in regeneration of the lost, his work in the church, and his activity as recorded in the Old Testament.

Owen's Definitions of Prayer

For Owen, writing about prayer was not just a matter of theological reflection. His work examines the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer so that believers can enjoy communion with God and obey him. As Ferguson writes, "For him it is axiomatic that theology finds its true expression in prayer, and prayer is the clearest reflection of theology."¹³ In his treatise, Owen offers three definitions of prayer.

First, Owen writes that prayer "is the vital breath of our spiritual life unto God."¹⁴ In other words, without prayer there can be no genuine practice of the Christian faith or any real sense of a relationship with God as Father. Just as verbal communication

Spirit of Prayer; With Plain Directions How Every Christian May Attain Them (Philadelphia: Thomas and William Bradford, 1800), 162.

¹² Barrett and Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life*, 26.

¹³ Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 224.

¹⁴ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 252.

is essential to healthy human relationships, verbal communication in prayer is essential to a healthy relationship with God. It is the Spirit of grace and supplications, who makes this relationship possible. Owen further emphasizes the essential nature of prayer when he writes, “It is that only single duty wherein every grace is acted, every sin is opposed, every good thing obtained, and the whole of our obedience in every instance of it is concerned.”¹⁵ In short, Spirit-enabled prayer is vital to communion with God, and nothing can replace it. John Bunyan (1628-1688), a Baptist contemporary of Owen, agrees with this perspective in his own discourse on prayer. Bunyan notes that prayer deepens a believer’s walk with Christ, so deepening prayer will naturally result in a deeper a relationship with God.¹⁶

Later, Owen offers another definition of prayer. He writes, “Prayer at present I take to be a gift, ability, or spiritual faculty of exercising faith, love, reverence, fear, delight, and other graces, in a way of vocal requests, supplications, and praises unto God.”¹⁷ This definition shifts the primary focus of prayer to God rather than the person praying in several different ways. First, if prayer is a “gift, ability, or spiritual faculty” then the capacity to pray comes from God rather than the individual. Second, according to Owen’s definition, the God-given ability to pray enables believers to pursue and enjoy a relationship with God. For example, believers rightly relate to God by exercising faith in him and expressing it through prayer. Therefore, their prayers will vocally express their trust in God’s character and promises as revealed in Scripture. Finally, Owen’s definition of prayer goes beyond making requests and supplications to an act of worship. Prayer is an opportunity to worship the Lord, enjoy fellowship with him, and surrender oneself to him.

¹⁵ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 318.

¹⁶ John Bunyan, *I Will Pray with the Spirit, and I Will Pray with the Understanding Also, or, A Discourse Touching Prayer, from 1 Cor. 14.15*, 2nd ed. (London: 1663), 3.

¹⁷ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 271.

Third, Owen defines prayer as “the obediential acting of the whole soul towards God.”¹⁸ In other words, biblical prayer is more than just voicing the right words. It must also come from the heart with expressions of love, joy, worship, sorrow, delight, thanksgiving, and more. This is possible by the power of the Holy Spirit within the believer. As Owen writes, “The Holy Spirit gives the soul of a believer a delight in God as the object of prayer.”¹⁹ So, with the help of the Spirit, prayer becomes an act of worship involving the whole person. As Bunyan writes, prayer that is empowered by the Holy Spirit is a “pouring out of the heart or soul” and an “unbosoming of a man’s self.”²⁰

Owen’s definitions help believers understand the necessity and nature of prayer in a biblical light. To Owen, prayer is essential to communion with God, and the Holy Spirit is the one who makes it possible. For Owen, prayer is a gift of the Holy Spirit whereby he enables believers to know God, worship him, and express faith in him with their whole soul.

The Roles of the Holy Spirit in Prayer

In Owen’s view, it is the Holy Spirit who gives believers the ability to pray in a way that pleases God and enables them to go deeper in their relationship with him. In his treatise, Owen calls attention to at least six ways that the Holy Spirit accomplishes this work. The Holy Spirit makes prayer possible by (1) giving believers the grace and desire to pray, (2) reminding them that they are his beloved children who can call God their Father, (3) bringing to their minds what they ought to pray about, (4) helping them pray in a manner pleasing to God, (5) enabling prayer in all situations, and (6) empowering deeper prayer that examines the heart in light of Scripture.

First, Owen argues that it is the Holy Spirit who gives believers the grace and

¹⁸ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 287.

¹⁹ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 290.

²⁰ Bunyan, *I Will Pray with the Spirit*, 14.

desire to pray because he is the Spirit of grace and supplications. Owen cites Zechariah 12:10, which states, “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplications.”²¹ Owen interprets this verse to mean that the Holy Spirit works to create in a believer an inclination to pray and an ability to pray.²² The believer who wishes to seek God does not do so in his own power or wisdom. However, one can seek God in prayer knowing that the Spirit within him enables him to accomplish and enjoy this holy gift. Citing Titus 3:6, Owen emphasizes that God’s promise to pour out the Spirit was accomplished with “plentiful effusion” after the ascension of Jesus Christ.²³ Therefore, there is no lack of strength and help in prayer for any believer. The Holy Spirit is fully present and able to help every believer pray as they should.

For those who feel frustrated or inadequate in prayer, Owen’s words regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer are an encouragement to persevere. The Spirit is at work in the duty of prayer both giving grace to every believer and helping every believer ask for the grace they need. This gift of grace is not exclusively for a certain class of Christian. It is available to everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Therefore, believers seeking to deepen their prayer lives can ask God with confidence to give them the desire and ability to pray.

Using Galatians 4:6, Owen addresses a second way that the Holy Spirit enables true prayer. Namely, the Holy Spirit reminds believers that they are the beloved children of God and enables them to call on God as their Father. Galatians 4:6 states, “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

²¹ All Scripture quotations in chapter 3 are taken from the King James Version because this was the version Owen and Matthew Henry used.

²² Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 259-60.

²³ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 255. Titus 3:5-6 says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.”

Owen sees this verse as a fulfillment of the promise in Zechariah.²⁴ Through Zechariah, God promised to pour out the Spirit centuries before the coming of Christ. Then he fulfilled that promise by adopting lost sinners through Jesus Christ and giving them the Spirit of adoption. So, by the Spirit, God enables believers to behave as children of God. It follows then, according to Owen, that the Spirit enables believers to cry out to God in prayer as Father. He gives them “faith, love and delight” in God as Father and enables them to vocalize all three.²⁵ As believers trust, love, and delight in God as Father, they do so because of the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. This work is not the work of the one praying. It is the work of the Spirit in and through them. Owen writes, “As it is an act of grace and spiritual power it is his, or it is wrought in us by Him alone. As it is a duty performed by us, by virtue of his assistance, it is ours,—by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father;’ and to deny his acting in our duties is to overthrow the gospel.”²⁶ Therefore, believers seeking a deeper prayer life must pray to God as Father, not in their own power but by relying on the power of God’s Spirit within them. In doing so, they can relate to God as someone who is relationally close while also worthy of fear and respect.

According to Owen, the Holy Spirit also enables prayer as he brings to mind what believers should pray about. Though what they should pray for may seem obvious—such as current needs and problems—Owen points out that people cannot in their own wisdom “know our temporal wants so as to make them the matter of prayer according to the mind of God.”²⁷ Therefore, it takes the Holy Spirit to help believers see what is ultimately good for them according to the will of God. Ferguson writes, “The Christian is not fully aware of his own needs; he is certainly not aware of how these

²⁴ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 265.

²⁵ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 266-68.

²⁶ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 268.

²⁷ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 273.

needs may be supplied by God; and he may be ignorant of the precise ends to which his prayer should be directed. This lack the Spirit can supply.”²⁸ Owen notes that the idea of this supply from the Holy Spirit can be found in Romans 8:26, which says, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” In light of Romans 8:26, Owen notes several important matters for prayers that the Holy Spirit brings to mind.

First, the principal supplication on the lips of believers should be inward sanctification.²⁹ A focus on sanctification deepens prayer as it draws the believer closer to God with a desire to be like him in his holiness. When the mind of the believer is freed from the bondage of sin, the remaining work of prayer follows as the individual is submitted to the work and power of the Holy Spirit. This work should begin, as Owen argues, with genuine expression of worship and a desire to be made holy.

Another important matter of prayer should be to pray in accordance with the promises of God in Scripture. Owen writes, “What God hath promised, all that he hath promised, and nothing else, are we to pray for; for ‘secret things belong unto the Lord our God’ alone, but the declaration of his will and grace belongs to us, and is our rule.”³⁰ In other words, God has made it clear in Scripture what he wills and promises for the life of the believer. Therefore, it is right to pray for God to fulfill those promises. Understanding this truth deepens prayer by deepening faith in God and what he has said he will do. It is possible for a person to pray with great certainty that they are praying according to God’s will, because God’s promises are clearly stated and he is faithful to fulfill them.

In addition to the promises in Scripture, Owen suggests that God’s commands

²⁸ Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 226.

²⁹ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 274.

³⁰ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 275.

should also provide matter for prayer.³¹ In other words, passages such as the Ten Commandments should bring believers an awareness of the mercy that is needed for sins and an awareness of what grace is needed to live a life pleasing to God. A deeper prayer life will consider all the commands of Scripture and plead for God's help in obeying them. For example, a believer may read Exodus 20:17 and understand that they are forbidden from coveting what someone else has. As they meditate on this command, the Holy Spirit brings a conviction of past covetousness, enables true repentance, and helps the believer pray for God's grace in avoiding covetousness in the future. Watts adds to this emphasis on the Spirit's use of Scripture in the matter of prayer: "He sanctifies our memory to treasure up such parts of the Holy Scripture as are proper to be used in prayer; he makes it faithful to retain them; and ready in the recollection of them at proper seasons."³² By the help of the Holy Spirit, those believers who memorize Scripture do so to their own benefit as they equip themselves with the very words of God that are needed in various circumstances.

James 4:3 also gives insight on what believers should pray for, according to Owen. It says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it on your pleasures." Based on this verse, Owen reminds readers that when they pray, they should pray for things so that God is glorified and not for sinful ends.³³ Deep prayer seeks God's goodness for God's glory instead of God's goodness for sinful pleasures. When pursuing a deeper prayer life, it can be helpful for believers to examine why they lift up certain petitions. Those that are not offered to the glory of God must be discarded.

Finally, regarding the proper matter of prayer, Owen argues that believers should give great attention to praying for faith. Specifically, they should pray for

³¹ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 284.

³² Watts, *A Guide to Prayer*, 170.

³³ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 276.

forgiveness for unbelief and ask for God to increase their faith. Owen writes, “If unbelief be the greatest of sins, and if faith be the greatest of the gifts of God, we are not Christians if these things are not one principal part of the matter of our prayers.”³⁴ A deeper prayer life will be characterized by a hunger for a deeper faith in God and his Word.

A fourth role the Holy Spirit plays in prayer is helping believers pray in a manner pleasing to God. Owen explains that a believer may be aware of what they should pray about but the “will and affections be dead unto them or unconcerned in them.”³⁵ The Holy Spirit is able to awaken those affections and stir the heart of a believer to genuinely worship God in prayer. The opening words of the Lord’s prayer and the words “Abba, Father” from Romans 8:26 give an indication of what God desires in the manner of prayer. Owen notes that the term Father suggests a “filial, holy delight” wherein a person delights in God as a Father who sits upon a throne of grace and prays with confidence and freedom.³⁶ Grace, freely given by God in Christ Jesus, should cause those who are aware of their depravity to prayerfully delight in God’s goodness and favor. Having previously been estranged from God, sinners have been reconciled to him through Jesus Christ. In Christ, they have become children of God and can prayerfully delight in God as a good father. This secure relationship with God through Christ encourages believers to pray with confidence that they will be heard. A believer seeking a deeper prayer life will depend on the Holy Spirit’s work within them to pray with worship, delight, freedom, and confidence in Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Savior.

By examining Ephesians 6:18, Owen argues that a fifth way that the Holy Spirit works in prayer is by helping believers pray at all times in all situations. A deeper

³⁴ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 277.

³⁵ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 287.

³⁶ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 291, 293-95.

prayer life will be characterized by this kind of praying that keeps one in continual communion with God regarding all of life. Ephesians 6:18 states, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Owen draws several observations from this verse. One observation is that this command is given to all believers and not just some who have an extraordinary gift to pray.³⁷ This reality should encourage believers who seek to deepen their prayer lives but feel ill equipped. Praying always and in all seasons is not possible, Owen argues, if believers are only confined to prescribed forms of prayer. He explains that these prescribed prayers will not help believers obey Ephesians 6:18 because they do not express the genuine affections of the heart at that moment or the present circumstances that are the immediate matter of prayer.³⁸ Constant prayer is commanded by God and can be prompted the Holy Spirit as the various circumstances of the day take place.

Finally, Owen uses Psalm 139:23-24 to show that the Holy Spirit enables deeper prayer by enabling believers to examine their hearts in light of Scripture. The psalm states, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” This passage demonstrates how believers can ask God to help them see themselves as they truly are so that sin will not hinder their life with him. The Holy Spirit does the work of convicting believers of their sin by using the truth of Scripture. Regarding the importance of Scripture to prayer, Owen writes, “The word is the instrument whereby the Holy Spirit reveals unto us our wants, when we know not what to ask, and so enables us to make intercessions according to the mind of God.”³⁹ Without a regular and thorough reading of

³⁷ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 297.

³⁸ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 298-300.

³⁹ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 321.

Scripture, the believer will be hindered in pursuing a deeper prayer life because Scripture reveals those matters that are important to God and pleasing to him. Owen notes that Scripture also reminds believers of the glorious excellencies of God so that they will value the gift of prayer. The one who meditates on these excellencies, and on the mediation and intercession of Christ, will be drawn to the duty of prayer, according to Owen.⁴⁰

In summary, Puritan pastor John Owen offers helpful guidance for deepening prayer by emphasizing Scripture's teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit in this spiritual practice. His work can be an inspiration to any believer who finds himself in a place of apathy, confusion, or helplessness regarding prayer. Using various Scriptures, Owen demonstrates that biblical prayer is essential to communion with God, and the Holy Spirit makes it possible. The Holy Spirit helps in various ways including giving believers the grace and desire to pursue God in prayer. In the next section, this chapter will consider how the writing of Puritan pastor Matthew Henry can also help modern-day believers deepen their prayer lives. In alignment with Owen's emphasis on the value of using Scripture in prayer, Henry outlines a guide that orders prayer by the example and words of Scripture itself.

Practicing the Types of Prayer Using Scripture

Like Owen, Puritan pastor Matthew Henry (1662-1714) also contributed significantly to the wealth of teaching on prayer through his work *A Method for Prayer*.⁴¹ Henry was born in 1662, the same year that the Act of Uniformity was enacted. He was a Presbyterian minister ordained in 1687 by six ministers who had been ejected from the established church. He spent more than two decades ministering in Chester before

⁴⁰ Owen, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 322.

⁴¹ Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer with Scripture Expressions Proper to Be Used under Each Head* (Edinburgh: T. Maccliesh, 1803).

moving to a leading church near London. Though he faced abuse from those who opposed dissenters to the established church, he was a leading minister in England with an extensive preaching and writing ministry.⁴² One of his best-known and enduring works is his *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*. The events taking place in England during his lifetime shaped his ministry. Jeremy Gregory writes,

His biography and ministry were to a large extent shaped by the issues which were involved in nonconformity, and the religious, political, and social consequences of being a Nonconformist in Later Stuart England. But Henry was not just a passive figure in this. Through his work and writings, Henry in turn helped shape and influence what it was to be a Nonconformist, and in particular what it meant to be “godly.”⁴³

For Puritans like Henry, godliness was impossible without prayer. His work, *A Method for Prayer*, helps believers in this endeavor by teaching them to order their prayers by the Word of God. He leads believers to structure their prayers with worship and adoration, confession and repentance, petition and supplication, thanksgiving, and intercession for others.

Henry’s Definition of Prayer

Henry first establishes a definition for prayer. He writes, “Prayer is the solemn and religious offering up of devout acknowledgments and desires to God, or a sincere representation of holy affections, with a design to give unto God the glory due unto his Name thereby, and to obtain from him promised favours, and both through the Mediator.”⁴⁴ Henry’s definition sounds similar to Owen’s perspective on prayer, except Henry in this definition emphasizes the role of the Mediator, namely Jesus Christ, rather than the role of the Holy Spirit. His definition of prayer, like those of other Puritans,

⁴² David L. Wykes, “Matthew Henry,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 26 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 582-83.

⁴³ Jeremy Gregory, “The Church and Nonconformity in Later Stuart England: The Wider World of Matthew Henry,” in *Matthew Henry: The Bible, Prayer, and Piety*, ed. Matthew A. Collins and Paul Middleton (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 16-17.

⁴⁴ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, iii.

includes not just an offering of petitions to God but an intent to glorify him and delight in him. Henry goes on to argue that while the “soul” of prayer is pouring out the heart to him, this soul needs a body, and that body is a method of prayer structured by the Word of God. He sees this method as a way of guarding oneself against careless praying. God’s people, Henry writes, should take care to not offer up to God anything that is “confused, impertinent, and indigested” so that believers will not be “rash with our mouth, nor hasty to utter any thing before God.”⁴⁵ While a deeper prayer life should embrace the freedom a child feels in the presence of a loving and welcoming Father, he is still God who is worthy of the best that his children have to offer him. To pray using the words of Scripture helps believers offer prayers that are genuine, from the heart, and orderly.

For anyone who may object that using Scripture to pray somehow perverts Scripture, Henry points to the church fathers and the New Testament writers who used Old Testament verses in ways that they were not originally intended to be understood.⁴⁶ Henry also cautions against being too rigid with the method he proposes. Depending on the current situation, it may be that thanksgiving should precede confession or that intercession for others takes more time than petitions for oneself.⁴⁷ Regardless of the order, Henry cautions that ordered prayer can become lifeless prayer if it is not sincere: “’Tis only the effectual fervent prayer, the *Deesis energumene*, the in-wrought, in-laid Prayer that avails much. Thus, therefore, we ought to approve ourselves to God in the integrity of our hearts, whether we pray by or without a pre-composed Form.”⁴⁸ With this warning in mind, Henry lays out a method for prayer that uses Scripture itself and involves various components including addressing God, confession of sin, thanksgiving,

⁴⁵ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, iv-vi.

⁴⁶ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, vii.

⁴⁷ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, viii.

⁴⁸ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, xi. *Deesis energumene* is the Greek taken from James 5:16 meaning “effectual, fervent prayer.”

and intercession.

The Various Types of Prayer

First, Henry instructs believers that they should approach God in worship and adoration. He is concerned primarily with the attitude of the heart and the mindset of the believer. In his estimation, prayer cannot be undertaken lightly or flippantly but should be pursued with a reverent and serious disposition.⁴⁹ Considering the scope of God's being and character, this is reasonable. Prayer is not some casual conversation with a human peer. It is an address to the eternal God of the universe. Therefore, when praying, a believer should eliminate distraction, approach God with faith, and then offer himself to him as a living sacrifice, according to Henry.⁵⁰ In other words, prayer is a serious business focused on worshipping God by offering oneself for his glory. Just as the Israelites came to the temple to offer sacrifices to God in worship, the New Testament believer should come before God offering himself as a living sacrifice in prayer. Following Henry's guidance, deep prayer must begin with this sort of inner posture. To pray with proper reverence, believers should consider what might take attention away from God and remove it. Then they should come before God with an attitude of surrender ready to trust him in every concern and to submit every detail of their lives to him.

Henry uses a large number of Scriptures throughout his work to help people pray with an awestruck sense of God's majesty and holiness and to help them be ready to worship him as he deserves. He breaks down these prayers under many different subheadings showing the various types of biblical prayer. First, he leads believers to pray with faith in God's presence and reverence for his majesty. For example, Henry suggests believers could begin their prayers using Revelation 4:8 praying, "Holy, Holy, holy Lord

⁴⁹ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 11.

⁵⁰ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 11.

God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come.”⁵¹ This example demonstrates how Henry intends to use God’s own words to address him and to bring about a true sense of who God is. He also includes admonitions to praise God according to his perfections, his attributes, his transcendence, his nature as Trinity, and his role as Creator and provider. Further, he uses various Scriptures to capture the importance of humbly embracing the gift of prayer, being thankful for it, and professing dependence on God.⁵²

Two other matters of prayer in Henry’s work emphasize a Puritan teaching that was also stressed by Owen. Namely, believers must plead for the powerful work of the Spirit of grace in prayer, and the highest purpose of their praying must be the glory of God. Just as Owen relies on Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 8:15 to establish the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s work in prayer, Henry encourages believers to use these verses to petition God to accomplish that work. He writes, “O pour upon us the Spirit of grace and supplication; the Spirit of adoption, teaching us to cry Abba Father; that we may find in our hearts to pray this prayer.”⁵³ Following Henry’s model, believers may deepen their prayer lives by worshipping God and addressing him with proper reverence and praise, using the words of God himself. With his focus on approaching God with proper reverence and worship, Henry sets the right tone for other aspects of prayer including confessions, petitions, thanksgivings, and intercession.

Next, Henry focuses attention on praying prayers of confession and repentance. This aspect of prayer requires humility and awareness of the scope of one’s own depravity. In this type of praying, “we must give glory to him, as our Judge by whom we deserve to be condemned, and yet hope, through Christ, to be acquitted and

⁵¹ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 12.

⁵² Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 13-40.

⁵³ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 29.

absolved.”⁵⁴ In prayers of confession and repentance, believers should acknowledge both the seriousness of sin and its consequences while also believing the gospel of Jesus Christ, which, alone, can provide forgiveness and restoration. Acknowledging the seriousness of sin is important because it can be tempting for believers to trivialize their sin or ignore it due to embarrassment or pride. The example of Scripture, however, reveals that when God’s people realize the vast scope of their disobedience, they adopt an attitude of contrition and actively petition God to forgive and cleanse sin.

In a fashion that heavily reflects the Augustinian and Reformed views of the total depravity of man, Henry spends much time and offers nearly three hundred verses of Scripture to help believers properly acknowledge the depth of their sin and the need for divine grace. He writes, “We must acknowledge the great reason we have to lie very low before God, and to be ashamed of ourselves when we come into his presence, and to be afraid of his wrath, having made ourselves both odious to his holiness, and obnoxious to his justice.”⁵⁵ Citing Isaiah 6:5, Henry offers a way to make such an acknowledgment in prayer: “When our eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts, we have reason to cry out, Woe unto us, for we are undone.”⁵⁶ When believers endeavor to confess their sins, there may be a tendency to think only of actions committed and words spoken that violate God’s commands. However, Henry reminds those who pray that they should also examine and confess the condition of their heart, which is corrupted by sin and resistant to the things of God apart from the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Lest believers only dwell on the seriousness of their own sin and the just judgment of God, Henry also reminds the reader that God has invited sinners to humble themselves before him with

⁵⁴ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 30.

⁵⁵ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 30-31.

⁵⁶ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 31.

confession so that they may find forgiveness.⁵⁷

Considering Henry's work regarding confession and repentance, a deeper prayer life must include an honest examination of one's own spiritual condition in light of the Scriptures and with the help of the Holy Spirit. Once a believer has properly acknowledged who God is, it follows that they would then see themselves in light of his holiness and majesty. They would be immediately humbled in awareness of their own sin. This practice may tend to bring about feelings of despair and hopelessness considering God's holiness and justice. However, believers should remember God's gracious invitation to confess one's sin and find the forgiveness only he can provide through the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Henry links the confession of sin to yet another aspect of prayer, which is petitioning God for all the good that he may provide, which his children need. If believers have properly confessed their sins, they must then petition God for the "remedy" and the help that only he can give, according to Henry. He notes that this petition does not mean informing God of needs and wants since God "knows us better than we know ourselves, and knows what he will do."⁵⁸ Instead, Henry argues, petitioning God is bringing those needs and wants to God and trusting his wisdom and goodness to do what is best. This way of thinking about prayer helps deepen a believer's prayer life by demonstrating that God's children do not bring their petitions to him like a businessperson issuing a work order. If this were so, it would seem that the person praying is the one in a position of power instead of God. Submitting petitions to God with trust that he will accomplish his good will regarding these matters puts the person praying in the right posture of humility and submission. Helpfully, Henry notes that a believer may bring their petitions before God, not with ignorance concerning his will, but they can "by faith plead his promise

⁵⁷ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 32, 34.

⁵⁸ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 51.

with him” since God has made his promises plain in Scripture.⁵⁹ Citing 1 John 5:14-15, Henry encourages believers to pray with the assurance that God hears when his children pray according to his will, and that when he hears, he will grant their petitions.⁶⁰ Those verses state, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” Henry goes on to assure believers who may be timid in prayer that they are qualified to receive the great promises of God, not by their own merit, but through his grace, which was made possible through the New Covenant in Jesus Christ.⁶¹

Henry notes that petitions that align with the promises of God include prayers for forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and peace of conscience. The primary petition he suggests is a petition for the grace of God in a wide variety of circumstances: to guard against temptation, to do works of righteousness, to lead in wisdom and truth, to sanctify human nature, and to help persevere to the end. It may surprise the modern reader to find that Henry does not elaborate much on petitioning God for various daily physical needs such as food, clothing, or shelter. However, in his estimation, these things are accounted for in God’s gracious provision when believers seek first the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33).⁶² The focus is almost entirely on spiritual needs so that the child of God may live a life pleasing to him. This focus can help modern-day believers deepen their prayer lives by helping them see that their greatest needs are spiritual. Indeed, though Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray for their daily bread, the majority of the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer concern the work of God to hallow his name and the need of the

⁵⁹ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 52.

⁶⁰ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 52.

⁶¹ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 52.

⁶² Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 53-85.

individual for forgiveness, the grace to forgive, and protection when evil and temptation threaten. The focus of these petitions concerning the kingdom of God flow naturally from prayer that begins with adoration and moves to confession.

When ordering prayer by Scripture, Henry also encourages believers to give thanks to God for the many mercies and gifts he provides. The importance of being thankful is magnified by the fact that all people are unworthy of any favor God shows them.⁶³ Using Henry's work, a deeper prayer life can be found in the practice of thanksgiving as it acknowledges not only God's provision in the physical realm but also his work spiritually in individuals and the church. For example, Henry encourages believers to give thanks that God has made them creatures with reason and the capacity for relationship so that they may know and enjoy God unlike the animals. Using Psalm 139:14 and 1 Corinthians 2:11, he writes, "We will praise thee, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and that our souls, our nobler part, know right well; for no man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man, which is in him."⁶⁴

Henry also says that thanksgiving is appropriate for provision, protection, success in work, public peace, God's plan of salvation, the coming of Christ, the cross and resurrection, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the work of the church, the writing of the Scriptures, the ordinances of the church, and much more.⁶⁵ What becomes clear, with the hundreds of Scripture references that Henry uses, is that thanksgiving should address the great realities of God and the gospel as well as the particular ways in which he provides for and protects individuals. A person with a deep prayer life will spend a great deal of time contemplating the goodness of God, the goodness of his gifts, and the goodness of the gospel, and be thankful for them all. Such thanksgiving also builds faith as it reminds

⁶³ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 85-86.

⁶⁴ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 90.

⁶⁵ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 90-115.

believers of God's past demonstrations of power and goodness. If God has been faithful to fulfill his promises in the past, there is no reason for his children to doubt his goodness in the present and future.

Finally, Henry also encourages the saints to spend time in prayer for others. Intercession on behalf of fellow believers should be pursued with the same fervency as petitions for oneself, he notes.⁶⁶ Fittingly, he begins with an encouragement to pray for all people, as all people are sinners in need of salvation. Citing 1 Timothy 2:3-4, he offers the following model for prayer: "We pray, as we are taught, for all men, believing that this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth, and of Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all."⁶⁷ Praying for the lost also includes praying for the work of missions in foreign lands, the conversion of Jews, the conversion of atheists, the comfort of those who are imprisoned for Christ, for healing where there is disunity in the church, for ministers of the gospel, for the poor, and for personal enemies.⁶⁸

This kind of intercession for others, both enemies and friends, is evidence of a deeper prayer life, as it gives evidence of a heart aligned with God's purposes. God is not solely concerned with the individual praying, but also with the church, community, and world they live in. If God's name will be hallowed as it deserves, it will not only be hallowed in the life of the individual, but in the life of all people. Prayers of intercession enable believers to serve others by calling upon God to pour out his mercies upon them.

Besides addressing all these types of prayer, Henry also takes some time to offer scriptural words that may be used to pray with others in public and private and in the conclusion of prayers. In sum, Henry is concerned to help believers pray by offering

⁶⁶ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 116.

⁶⁷ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 116.

⁶⁸ Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, 116-37.

to them Scriptural expressions that will help them draw near to God in a way that is not random or chaotic but orderly and worshipful. A believer's prayer life will not be restricted by using a method like this. Rather, it will free them to pray without concerns about whether their prayers are pleasing to God and within his will. Scripture itself will be the guide that sets the praying individual free.

Conclusion

As chapter 2 of this project demonstrates, a believer seeking to deepen his prayer life should begin with a thorough study of what the Scripture teaches regarding prayer. Passages like Matthew 6:9-13 and Psalm 51 are helpful guides for believers who endeavor to pray in a way that pleases God. However, a great wealth of wisdom will be missed if they disregard what faithful Christians throughout the ages have learned regarding the nature and practice of prayer. Puritan pastors and theologians were compelled by their own convictions to preach and publish works that sought to call Christians back to fervent, effective, biblical prayer. John Owen and Matthew Henry were two such men. Owen's discourse on the essential nature of the Holy Spirit's role in prayer continues to encourage and train believers who may feel apathetic or inadequate regarding this holy pursuit. He sees prayer as essential to the Christian life and the Holy Spirit as essential to biblical prayer. Owen uses Scripture to show that the Holy Spirit enables prayer by giving believers the grace and desire to pray. The Spirit also reminds believers of their spiritual adoptions, gives biblical matter for prayer, enables a holy manner of prayer, enables prayer in all situations, and helps believers examine their hearts in prayer using the truth of Scripture. In sum, the deeper prayer life is possible for every believer because every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, empowering them to pray in a biblical manner.

Henry's writings offer a practical guide for ordering prayer according to the Scripture to teach believers what to pray and how to pray in a way that pleases God.

From worship and adoration to confession and petitions, numerous Scriptures can be used by any believer with a Bible under the leadership of the Holy Spirit to pursue God in prayer. Of course, using the words of Scripture alone does not guarantee deeper prayer that pleases God. Prayer must be fervent and sincere. However, using Scripture helps guide the believer to pray as the saints of old who walked closely with God, such as King David of Israel or the apostle Paul. The believer who is serious about deepening their prayer life will consider their teachings along with the writings of other Puritans whose understanding of prayer was shaped by Scripture, the Reformation, the church fathers, and their own experience of praying in the Spirit.⁶⁹ The next chapter describes how the insights and teachings gleaned in the study of Scripture and Puritan writings are distilled into a course designed to deepen the prayer lives of leaders at First Baptist Church in Sevierville, Tennessee.

⁶⁹ For an introduction to the works of other Puritans, the reader may consider an introductory work such as the previously cited book *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, edited by Kelly Kapic and Randall Gleason.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter describes the planning and implementation of the ministry project to deepen the prayer lives of lay leaders at First Baptist Church Sevierville. The project involved teaching an eight-session class over a period of four Sundays in the Spring of 2023. Two sessions were covered each Sunday evening with a small break in between. Preparation for the class began in December 2022, including writing the curriculum and editing the survey items. The project concluded on May 7, 2023, as class participants completed post-class surveys. The following is a detailed description of the steps taken from curriculum development to project conclusion.

Preparation

Survey Development

In July 2021, I wrote a preliminary list of survey items to measure the depth of the personal prayer lives of lay leaders at FBC as part of the Project Methodology seminar with Professor Matt Haste. The goal of the survey items was to evaluate whether teaching a course on deepening prayer would make a statistically significant difference in deepening their prayer lives by comparing dependent samples in a pre-test and post-test survey. Over the next year, I prepared for the course by researching the Lord's Prayer, Psalm 51, and Puritan teaching on prayer, leading to a clearer understanding of what a deep personal prayer life entails. In December 2023, in consultation with my faculty supervisor, Professor Joe Harrod, I edited the original survey items to align more closely with my research and what I planned to teach. Professor Harrod encouraged me to make my survey items more concise and to not measure anything in the survey that I did not

plan to teach. Ultimately, the result was a more focused twelve-item survey to be given to all class participants, paired with a five-question interview to be used with select participants prior to the class. I designed the survey to use a randomly assigned four-digit code to identify participants so that they could answer the survey anonymously. It included a Likert scale for class participants to record their responses. The scale included six options from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Once Professor Harrod approved my survey items, they were submitted to the Research Ethics Committee at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for review and approval. The survey items and interview questions were approved on February 2, 2023.

Curriculum Development

To help deepen the prayer lives of lay leaders at FBC, I developed an eight-session class titled Deeper Prayer. Research for the class began in the summer and fall of 2021 as I researched and wrote chapters 2 and 3 of this ministry project. Development of the curriculum concluded in the Spring of 2023 as an expert panel reviewed it and provided feedback.

Research and writing for chapter 2 of this project provided a significant amount of the biblical content and teaching for the course. Chapter 2 is a treatment of the biblical and theological support for the project that focused on analysis of the Lord’s Prayer as found in Matthew 6:9-13, and Psalm 51 as a representative of the penitential psalms. In particular, the class sessions on praying in a way that pleases God, praying prayers of praise and thanksgiving, and prayers of confession were shaped directly by the research and writing involved in chapter 2.

Chapter 3 of this project also provided a significant amount of content for the class. The research and writing for that chapter involved an analysis of Puritan teaching on prayer. Specifically, it analyzed John Owen’s writing on the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer and Matthew Henry’s instructions on using the Scripture to guide prayer. Out of

this study came class sessions on the importance of making prayer a daily discipline, receiving the help of the Holy Spirit in prayer, and how the Scripture helps believers pray.

In December 2022, in consultation with my project supervisor, I finalized what each of the class sessions would teach, making sure that the class content and survey items aligned and were focused on deepening the prayer lives of lay leaders. Over the course of the next two months, I wrote a detailed class curriculum that included the six themes named above as well as the role of prayer in spiritual warfare and a final session answering commonly asked questions about prayer. For each session, I began with a one- or two-sentence statement about the main idea for the lesson followed by a key verse from Scripture that would determine the direction of that session's content. Each session was designed to include biblical teaching on prayer and discussion questions leading the participants to process together what they were learning. At the end of each session, I included challenges to apply what was learned and homework that would prepare the participant for the next session. In conjunction with the class content, each participant received a copy of Don Whitney's book *Praying the Bible*, which supplemented the teaching in session 3 on how the Scripture helps believers pray.

Curriculum Review by Expert Panel

In January 2023, I enlisted the assistance of four pastors to be an expert panel to evaluate the Deeper Prayer class curriculum. Each pastor utilized a curriculum evaluation tool that I provided them by email.¹ The goal was to have each pastor evaluate the biblical accuracy, teaching methodology, scope, and practical application of the curriculum and verify that the content was adequate to meet the stated criteria. The expert panel included two senior pastors and two associate pastors whose ministry focus is education. One of them is the senior pastor at FBC where the project was conducted. The

¹ See appendix 1.

second one is an associate pastor at FBC whose primary ministry responsibility was education through small group discipleship for approximately ten years before transitioning to another role. The third expert is a retired associate pastor of education at FBC. The fourth one is the senior pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church. Three of these men hold master's degrees in a theological field, and all of them have served more than a decade in full-time ministry with one of them serving more than forty years. Each of them indicated through the evaluation tool that the content was exemplary and exceeded the criteria. One of them provided helpful feedback and suggestions regarding wording to make the content clearer to participants. Overall, their evaluations demonstrated that the class was ready for implementation.

Selecting Participants

In February 2023, I sent an email to the lay leaders of FBC to invite them to participate in the Deeper Prayer class. The invitation explained the nature and purpose of the course, the dates, and that they would be asked to take an anonymous and voluntary survey before and after the class. The email was sent to three specific categories of lay leaders at FBC. The categories were life group leaders of all age departments, deacons, and directors of on-campus ministries, such as the Helping Hands ministry which distributes food and the gospel weekly to neighbors in need. Initially, twenty-five people committed to attend the class, including three FBC staff members who would not fill out the survey but wanted to participate in the class. Those three staff members ultimately did not participate. Also, when class began, two lay leaders joined the class who had not previously registered. Five of the lay leaders who initially committed to the class did not end up participating. In the end, nineteen lay leaders participated in the class. Nine of them had perfect attendance. Nine more were present for all but one evening. The one remaining participant was only able to attend one of the evenings. Of the nineteen participants, eighteen took the surveys, but only seventeen surveys were valid for analysis.

as one of the participants failed to respond to all of the survey items. The lay leaders who participated included fourteen life group leaders, four deacons, and four ministry leaders. Some of them met more than one of the criteria, such as one participant who is both a deacon and ministry leader.

Pre-Class Interviews

Before the first session of the class, I conducted an in-person interview with five participants using the same five questions with each of them to gain greater insight into their prayer lives.² When they agreed to the interview, I sent the participants the questions ahead of time so that they would be better prepared to answer. The questions provided insight into the personal prayer lives of each participant by assessing their knowledge of what Scripture says about prayer, their assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses in prayer, and what questions they may have about prayer.

One common question that four of the five participants shared was why it seems that God does not always fulfill his promise of giving believers whatever they ask in Jesus's name. As a result, I made sure to spend time addressing this question in the class. Also, I was encouraged to spend ample time addressing perceived weaknesses in their prayer lives as they shared concerns about their lack of patience and persistence in prayer. My overall impression of the participants that I interviewed is that they were already committed to the discipline of daily personal prayer but that they also desired to grow deeper in their prayer lives.

Implementation

Before the first session of the class, my ministry assistant secured a meeting room, bought journals and pens, made copies of the lessons, and bought copies of *Praying the Bible* for each participant. She also made a role sheet to track attendance and

² See appendix 2.

generated enough four-digit numbers on pieces of paper to be randomly drawn by participants to use to identify themselves on the anonymous pre-class and post-class surveys.

Session 1: Pursuing God in Daily Prayer

The class began on Sunday, April 16, with session 1. As participants entered the room, they checked the roll and received their class notes, journals, pens, and books. After a brief introduction of the course and an opening prayer, I explained the pre-class survey and encouraged each participant to be thoughtful and take their time. Each person randomly drew a number from a basket that they used on their survey to identify themselves. One of the participants volunteered to keep a list of who drew what number so that class members could retrieve their number for the post-class survey if they forgot it. It took about ten to fifteen minutes for the class to complete their surveys. After collecting them, I began teaching the material for the first session.

Session 1 stressed the importance of praying daily. The big idea was that developing a daily prayer habit is essential to a deeper prayer life and a healthy relationship with God. After reading Colossians 4:2 as the key verse for the session, I had volunteers read from four different quotes that gave a definition of prayer. The quotes were from J. Gary Miller, Henry Blackaby, John Bunyan, and John Owen. I asked the class to discuss which of the definitions was best and why. Then I asked the class to pair up with a partner and discuss how they might define prayer for a new Christian who has never been in church and knows little or nothing about prayer. I then taught about the prayer habits of the prophet Daniel before discussing what the consequences of neglecting daily prayer might be. As part of this teaching, I used Colossians 4:2 to show how believers should be steadfast in prayer. At the conclusion of the class, I offered six tips for starting a habit of daily prayer before encouraging the class to think of more. After the session, I assigned homework before taking a quick break. The homework

included reading part of *Praying the Bible* as well as personally applying lessons learned from the first session.

Session 2: How the Holy Spirit Helps Us Pray

After a short break following the first session, the class participants came back in the room for another hour to go through session 2, which focused on how the Holy Spirit can help them grow deeper in their prayer lives. To ensure maximum participation, and reduce absences due to sickness and travel, I taught two of the sessions each evening we met with a short break in between each session.

When session 2 began, I introduced the big idea for the session that prayer can be challenging for various reasons, but the Holy Spirit will help believers in prayer. The class discussed Zechariah 12:10 as the key verse for the session and identified some of the ways that they have struggled in their personal prayer lives. After this discussion, I taught on five different ways that the Holy Spirit helps believers pray, with credit given to Puritan pastor John Owen for his work in *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*. With references to several Scriptures, I noted that the Holy Spirit gives believers the grace and desire to pray. He also reminds believers of who they are and who God the Father is. He intercedes for believers when they do not know what to pray. He examines believers' hearts in prayer. Finally, he helps believers pray at all times.

Following teaching on these five points, the class discussed which of the truths encouraged them most and why. After the discussion, the class watched a short video explaining the nature of God's oneness and how the Holy Spirit is God while Jesus and the Father are also God.³ Following the video, I gave the class four different action steps to depend on the Holy Spirit's help in prayer. For homework, I assigned reading from

³ Aaron Armstrong, "Is the Holy Spirit Really God?," LifeWay, November 25, 2020, YouTube video, 1:33, <https://youtu.be/l8opmF4qyJE>.

Praying the Bible and encouraged them to read Jesus's teachings on the Holy Spirit in two different passages in John. If any participants were not present for a certain session, I always emailed them a copy of the session notes and encouraged them to study them and follow through on the homework.

Session 3: How Scripture Helps Us Pray

When participants came back for the second week for sessions 3 and 4, it seemed that excitement was already growing about what they were learning. They shared about how the previous two sessions, plus what they were reading in the Whitney book, were already deepening their prayer lives. Some of the participants who had not contributed as much to previous discussions began to get more involved as well.

Session 3 focused on how Scripture helps believers pray by helping them not get distracted and giving them guidance on how to pray. Second Corinthians 1:20 was the theme verse with a focus on how God's promises are useful for prayer. After watching a video with Professor Don Whitney on how to use Scripture in prayer, I taught about examples in Scripture of how to pray, such as examples from the lives of Moses, Hannah, David, Jesus, and Paul. I also presented how Scripture orders prayer, including Matthew Henry's method for ordering prayer with Scripture. Then the class looked at four specific promises in Scripture that can be used to order and strengthen prayer. One example is Philippians 4:6-7 where Paul says that God gives peace to believers who bring their requests to God instead of being anxious about them. Class members then discussed which of the Scriptures they could use to guide them in prayer for the following week. Then participants were encouraged in how to apply the truths they learned throughout the week and assigned homework before having a short break. The homework was to continue reading *Praying the Bible* and to choose a biblical promise to guide personal prayer time during the week.

Session 4: Prayers That Please God

After session 3 and a brief break, the class reconvened for session 4 to learn how to pray in a way that pleases God. The big idea was that Jesus taught his disciples how to pray in a way that pleases God by giving them the Lord's Prayer as recorded in Matthew 6:9-10. The key verse to start the session was James 4:3.

Following the introductory material, I focused on five major points regarding prayer. I taught on the opening words of the Lord's Prayer to demonstrate how pleasing prayer begins with a right view of God and properly addressing him. The following points included how pleasing prayer is fueled by faith, is offered in Jesus's name, has right motives, and is never hypocritical. The class discussed what it means to pray in Jesus's name and how people might pray with wrong motives. The class then discussed what other items might be added to the list for praying in a way that pleases God.

To apply the lesson, I asked the class to spend time silently praying in light of the truths they had learned and to evaluate whether their own prayer lives were pleasing to God. For homework, the class was challenged to use the Lord's Prayer as a guide for the personal prayer time throughout the week and to finish *Praying the Bible* by reading both of the appendices in the back of the book.

Session 5: Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving

Sessions 5 and 6 took place on the third week of meetings, and by this time, the class had already read through *Praying the Bible*. The class took some time at the beginning of session 5 to discuss what they had learned and how their prayer lives were already changing for the better. After a time of opening prayer, I introduced the class to the session's big idea, which is that prayer is more than expressing personal needs to God. A deeper prayer life should also include praise and thanksgiving.

Before I taught the content for the session, the class made a list of the attributes of God and discussed which ones excite them the most. This led to a discussion of

delighting in God in prayer by praising him for his glorious attributes. The outline of teaching that followed emphasized that prayer is worship, that thanksgiving in prayer builds faith, and that the nature of our prayers is shaped by our view of who God is. This teaching was followed by a discussion of how the attributes of God shape the way we pray.

At the end of the session, I instructed the participants to spend some time in prayer thanking God. I also instructed them to take extra time for prayer during the week on their day off. During that time, they were to use Psalm 146 to lead them into an extended time of praise and thanksgiving.

Session 6: Prayers of Confession

After a brief break following session 5, I introduced the class to the theme of session 6, which was that believers must regularly confess their sins to God to have a deeper prayer life. I began the class by talking about the promise of 1 John 1:9. Then the class discussed why we sometimes neglect confession in prayers or only give it a cursory mention.

After the discussion, I taught on several Bible passages regarding confession. I showed how confession and repentance remove barriers to prayer by teaching from Psalm 66:18 and other passages. I also showed how it is wrong to expect forgiveness for our sins when we harbor unforgiveness toward others by teaching from Matthew 6:14-15. Finally, I taught how confession reminds us of the gospel and our need to trust Christ daily. To conclude, I led the class in an examination of Psalm 51 and showed how it and other penitential psalms are profitable for use in prayers of confession.

At the end of class, we read Psalm 51 aloud and I challenged everyone to choose a verse from the psalm that they could use that week in their prayers of confession. I also instructed them to read Psalm 139:23-34 throughout the week. Using

these verses, the participants were to make a list of sins that the Holy Spirit brought to mind.

Session 7: The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Warfare

On the fourth and final night of class, I taught sessions 7 and 8. We opened the class with prayer, and I highlighted the theme of session 7, which was that seeking God's help in the face of spiritual attack is essential to a deeper prayer life. The theme verse was Ephesians 6:18. I asked someone in the class to read 1 Peter 5:8-9 to highlight the reality of spiritual warfare and asked the class to discuss how prayer helps believers resist the enemy and stand firm in the faith.

After the opening discussion, I emphasized three main points. First, we should pray for deliverance from evil. Next, prayer enables believers to wage war spiritually. Finally, since evangelism and missions are aggressive spiritual acts, believers must pray before engaging the lost with the gospel. To support these points, I taught from various Scriptures such as Matthew 6:13, John 17:15-19, James 4:7, and Ephesians 6:19-20. To apply these truths, I asked the class to partner with someone else, read Acts 4:23-31, and then begin praying for each other to have boldness in being a gospel witness.

To conclude the session, I asked the participants to read Psalm 3 and then spend a few minutes writing out their own prayer of deliverance in their journals. I then challenged them to read Psalm 18 sometime during the week and to use it as a prayer guide for spiritual protection and victory. We then took a short break before reconvening to cover the final session and take the post-class surveys.

Session 8: Frequently Asked Questions

Session 8 was devoted to answering frequently asked questions about prayer. Some of the teaching and discussion came from the pre-class interviews conducted with selected class participants. The key Scripture passage for the session was Proverbs 3:5-6.

In the teaching time, I addressed the following questions:

1. If God is omniscient and sovereign, why do we pray?
2. Does God accept the prayers of non-Christians who call on him?
3. Is it necessary to fast with prayer?
4. Does prayer ever change God's mind?
5. Should I pray to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, or all three?

Because the question came up frequently in the pre-class interviews, I also addressed why it seems to many believers that God sometimes does not give them what they ask for in Jesus's name. At the end of the session, I asked the class to take time to discuss what they had learned over the eight sessions. After the discussion, I closed the session in prayer before handing out the post-class surveys. The class, once again, took about fifteen minutes to fill out the post-class surveys. For an analysis of the survey results, see chapter 5 and appendix 3.

Conclusion

Overall, the process of implementation of the ministry project took approximately five months. The process was fairly smooth as the Research Ethics Committee and the expert review panel approved the research process and curriculum with no changes necessary. My goal was to have at least fifteen participants in the class, and nineteen attended with seventeen taking the surveys. By the end of the class, most of the participants verbally affirmed that their prayer lives had deepened as a result of the class. The survey results statistically confirmed their comments that the class had made a significant difference in helping them deepen their prayer lives.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The spiritual health of a church can be measured in part by the spiritual health of its leaders. Likewise, the spiritual health of church leaders can be measured in part by the strength of their prayer lives. Believing those two statements to be true, First Baptist Church Sevierville has sought over the years to be a praying church led by praying leaders. While FBC pastors, including me, have delivered various sermon series on prayer and begun prayer initiatives, there was still much work to be done. Therefore, as I began to explore what kind of ministry project might be most beneficial for FBC, I sensed the Holy Spirit leading me to focus on equipping lay leaders at FBC to have deeper prayer lives. The ministry project came to completion in May 2023 with a positive outcome.

This chapter evaluates how well the project actually achieved its stated purpose and goals. I will also evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the project and reflect on what I would do differently. Finally, I will provide theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

As stated in chapter 1, the purpose of this ministry project was to deepen the prayer lives of lay leaders at FBC. The rationale for this purpose was that all biblically faithful churches should be characterized by devoted prayer and, therefore, its leaders must be people of prayer. In other words, if the leaders do not have deep personal prayer lives, it is unlikely that the church will be characterized by prayer.

The purpose had both a biblical and practical foundation. Throughout Scripture, God's people are seen calling on him in prayer. The book of Acts reveals how

committed the early church was to prayer (Acts 4:24-31). Paul's epistles clearly command the church to be a praying church (1 Tim 2:1). Based on the biblical evidence, churches must be characterized by prayer.

Practically, FBC leadership has also recognized that unless prayer is integral to the life of the church, the church will not be able to realize its future goals of developing a ministry village and launching new life groups around Sevier County. These goals are ambitious, even for a church like FBC with a relatively significant number of people and resources. If these goals are realized in a fashion that pleases the Lord, then dependence on the Lord in prayer for strength, wisdom, and provision is paramount. In sum, the purpose of deepening the prayer lives of lay leaders at FBC was both consistent with biblical examples and commandments and was an important foundation for carrying out the specific long-term ministry goals of the church. The project fulfilled its purpose by equipping seventeen lay leaders to deepen their prayer lives through an eight-session class.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The project had three goals designed to accomplish its purpose. These goals were ultimately effective in deepening the prayer lives of lay leaders at FBC. The three goals were: (1) to assess the current personal prayer lives of lay leaders at FBC, (2) to develop an eight-session curriculum that will equip leaders to grow in their personal practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer, and (3) to deepen the personal prayer lives of FBC lay leaders.

Goal 1: Assess Current Personal Prayer Lives

The first goal was to assess the current personal prayer lives of FBC lay leaders. The assessment was accomplished by developing a twelve-item survey plus a five-question interview. Prior to the class, I interviewed five different lay leaders

regarding their personal prayer lives. I sought to assess their knowledge of what the Bible says about prayer, plus gauge their own assessment of their personal strengths and weaknesses in the area of prayer. Before teaching the first session, I also gave each lay leader participant a survey. They responded to each survey item by rating themselves on a six-point Likert scale. The measure of success for this first goal was to assess at least fifteen lay leaders. The goal was successfully met as seventeen of the nineteen lay leaders in the class filled out the survey, and five of the lay leaders participated in an interview.

After the interviews, it was evident to me that many of our lay leaders were already committed to prayer as a personal spiritual discipline. They did not need to be convinced of the importance of prayer for personal spiritual vitality or for the health of the church. They did, however, recognize that there were areas in their personal prayer lives that could be improved. One participant identified a busy schedule as a hindrance to a deep prayer life. Another saw a lack of persistence in prayer over specific requests as a shortcoming. Still another participant lamented that they focus too much on themselves in prayer rather than God and others. Another insight gained from the interviews was a common confusion about why it seems that God does not always fulfill his promise of giving believers whatever they ask for in Jesus's name (John 14:13-14). This prompted me to spend more time addressing that issue in session 8.

In addition to the interviews, seventeen of the nineteen class participants filled out pre-class and post-class surveys.¹ The pre-class surveys indicated that, on average, participants felt most lacking in their ability to train others to pray (item 4) with a mean of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 1.06. The data from item 4 confirmed to me that a ministry project to deepen the prayer lives of lay leaders was needed. Lay leaders who feel unsure about their capacity to train others to pray reveal a lack of confidence about the depth of their own prayer lives. The participants also felt lacking in their ability to

¹ See appendix 2.

stay focused when they pray (item 9) with a mean of 3.47 and standard deviation of 1.58. This result was not surprising as it is a common complaint that I have heard from many believers. Seeing this result confirmed the need for material in the curriculum meant to address this issue. I had already planned to use *Praying the Bible* to help in this area. Overcoming an inability to stay focused in prayer is a key aspect of *Praying the Bible*.

The results of the pre-class survey also revealed that the participants rated themselves highest in their regularity of including praise and thanksgiving in their prayers (item 10) with a mean of 5.41 and a standard deviation of 0.49. The second highest rating was a mean of 5.06 for including regular confession of sin and repentance in their prayers (item 12). The standard deviation for item 12 was 0.87. The results of these two items were encouraging as they revealed a strong awareness of how biblical prayer should include more than a mere recitation of needs. The leaders indicated that their prayer lives include regular praise, thanksgiving, confession of sin, and repentance showing that they already had a good understanding of the basic elements of biblical prayer. Overall, none of the scores were below 3.24, and seven of the twelve responses averaged above a score of 4. The numbers from the pre-class survey seemed to indicate that most leaders believed they have a relatively healthy prayer life with room to go deeper.

Goal 2: Develop a Curriculum

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum that equipped leaders to grow in their personal practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer. The research and writing that I did for chapters 2 and 3 of this project provided a lot of the content for the class. Using my research and drawing on other resources, I developed an eight-session curriculum over the course of a couple of months at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023. In the curriculum, I sought to integrate teaching about prayer from Scripture, along with insights from believers throughout church history. I also sought to make the classes interactive and practical, helping the participants personally process

what they had learned and put it into practice. Lessons included components like a big idea, a key verse, discussion questions, Scripture references and interpretations, teaching from Puritan pastors, and homework.

At the beginning of the project, I established that an expert panel, consisting of four different pastors, would utilize a rubric to evaluate the biblical accuracy, teaching methodology, scope, and practical application of the curriculum.² If a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level, then goal 2 would be successfully accomplished. I sent four different pastors the curriculum. Their feedback was minimal but positive. Their assessments showed that 100 percent of the evaluation criteria exceeded the sufficient level, so no changes were necessary beyond changing a couple of words to provide greater clarity. For example, one pastor suggested I find a different word to use instead of “supplication.” In sum, I successfully accomplished goal 2, creating a curriculum that met the standards needed to equip lay leaders to grow in their personal practice of the discipline of prayer.

Goal 3: Deepen Prayer Lives of Lay Leaders

The third goal was to deepen the personal prayer lives of FBC lay leaders. Ultimately, this was the purpose of the project. My hope was that by taking lay leaders through the curriculum, they would have a greater understanding of Scripture’s teaching on prayer and how they can put it into practice. If the lay leaders were able to deepen their prayer lives, then they would grow in knowledge of God, and lead their fellow church members to do the same. This goal was measured by administering the prayer survey³ again within one week following the final session of the course. I did this by having class participants take the survey at the conclusion of the final session. For those

² See appendix 1.

³ See appendix 2.

who were absent for the last session, they completed the survey and submitted it within one week. The final goal used a t-test to determine whether the goal was successfully met. The t-test compared the pre-class and post-class survey results of the lay leaders at FBC. The goal was successfully met when I ran a t-test for the dependent samples, which demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test training survey scores: $t_{(16)} = -6.74, p < .0001$.⁴

The statistically significant difference between the pre-class surveys and the surveys taken at the conclusion was anecdotally confirmed by the testimonies of those who participated in the class. Some said that their prayer lives had deepened and that they wanted to pass along what they had learned. One life group leader requested a copy of the curriculum so that she could train the women in her group. She said the class “revolutionized” her prayer life.

Analyzing the average scores on each of the items showed that the greatest improvements were achieved on items 3 and 4.⁵ Item 3 jumped from a mean 3.88 to 5.65. Item 4 increased from a mean of 3.24 to 4.76. Those items evaluated whether FBC had trained them to pray well and whether they felt sufficiently prepared to train others to pray. Ultimately, the difference in item 3 showed that the participants felt the course helped them deepen their prayer lives. The difference in item 4 also showed that they felt better equipped to train others to have deeper prayer lives. When analyzed independently, each of the twelve items on the survey moved in a positive direction by the end of the course. As expected, the areas where participants evaluated themselves strongest at the beginning changed less on average relative to the other survey items.

Strengths of the Project

The greatest strength of the project was the reliance of the curriculum on

⁴ See appendix 3.

⁵ See appendix 2.

scriptural instruction. Equipping lay leaders to deepen their prayer lives required training them in what the Scripture has to say about prayer. Believing that Scripture is God's Word, I was confident that if the leaders were sufficiently taught God's perspective on prayer that there would significant change for the better in their prayer lives.

Another strength of the project was condensing eight sessions of curriculum into four evenings of instruction. I have served on staff at FBC for more than eighteen years, and I have observed a significant drop in attendance of eight-week courses after the first several sessions. To ensure maximum participation, I felt like I should teach two sessions back-to-back each week. This proved to be effective. Nine of the participants had perfect attendance. Nine more only missed one evening, meaning that they missed two of the eight sessions. Those participants received the notes by email and were able to keep up with everyone else.

Another strength of the project was the appeal to different kinds of lay leaders. Invitations were sent to lay leaders who are life group leaders, deacons, and ministry leaders. Of those who participated, some teach adult life groups, others teach life groups for teenagers and children, some are deacons, and one is the director for our church's English as a Second Language Ministry. By deepening the prayer lives of such a diversity of lay leaders, I believe the project will have a greater long-term impact.

A final strength of the project was the inclusion of discussion questions and the opportunity to put the instruction into practice during class time and throughout the week. By giving the class time to process what they were learning together and by giving them homework assignments, they were able to immediately act on what they were learning. Many of the class participants shared during the later sessions how they were already seeing their prayer life deepen as they used the Scripture to order their prayers.

Weaknesses of the Project

One weakness of the project is related to one of its strengths. While

condensing eight sessions of instruction into four weeks ensured greater attendance and participation, it also limited the amount of time I felt like I could spend in each session. Because I was teaching two lessons back-to-back each evening, I felt compelled to keep the sessions moving to keep our time together at a maximum of around two hours. Had I only covered one session per week, I would have felt greater freedom to spend more time in discussion and prayer during the sessions.

Another weakness was the lack of constructive feedback from the expert panel. While I appreciated the encouraging remarks and the excellent evaluations, I think the project could have benefitted from more specific suggestions on how the curriculum could be strengthened. Only one member of the panel offered any suggestions for what I might change and those were minimal.

Another weakness of the project was that I waited until the beginning of the first class session to administer the pre-class survey. Had I administered it earlier, I might have had more time to evaluate what the surveys showed and how that might influence the way I teach the curriculum. I conducted the interviews far enough before the classes to benefit from that feedback, but I could have benefitted more from the pre-class survey had I administered it earlier.

What I Would Do Differently

After implementing this ministry project, I have learned some lessons about what I would do differently next time. The first thing I would do differently is to personally recruit lay leaders to participate in the class. To recruit lay leaders to take the class, I sent a mass email to all our church's life group leaders, deacons, and ministry leaders. Part of the reason for the mass email was the large number of individuals who make up this group. The email was effective in meeting the minimum number of participants for the project, but I probably would have had greater success by personally calling or meeting up with certain leaders to individually invite them to participate.

Another thing I would do is arrange the classroom differently. I began the class in a traditional format of rows of chairs facing the front where I stood at a podium. In retrospect, I think some of the participants might have felt more comfortable participating in the discussion had I arranged the chairs in a circle with me sitting in the circle. Discussion was still rich and productive, but I believe it could have been enhanced by a different set up for the room.

If I could do the project again, I would also interview more participants ahead of time. I interviewed five of the nineteen class members, but I think if I had interviewed at least ten of them I would have gotten even more meaningful insights into the state of their prayer lives. In addition, I would administer the pre-class survey prior to the beginning of the first class so that I could have had more time to evaluate the responses before beginning the curriculum.

Finally, even though they would not have qualified as lay leaders for the surveys, if I could go back, I would more strongly encourage all our pastors to participate in the class. I believe their participation alongside the lay leaders would have enhanced the impact of the course on our lay leaders and the church at large. It makes sense to me to for the pastors and lay leaders to seek to grow deeper in prayer together.

Theological Reflections

After completing this ministry project, I have gained several theological insights. One is a greater appreciation for the theological insights of believers in past centuries. While contemporary commentaries on prayer and Scripture are sometimes valuable, broadening the scope of my reading broadened my understanding. This growth began in my doctoral seminar on historical theology with Professor Joe Harrod. Reading the theological insights of men like Tertullian, John Calvin, and John Gill helped me be more thoughtful about why I believe what I believe about God and the Bible. This continued in my research and writing for chapters 2 and 3 of this project. As I researched

primary sources from men who died centuries ago, I gained a greater understanding of the Lord's Prayer and of the Holy Spirit's role in prayer.

As for the Holy Spirit's role in prayer, I had not given it much consideration before researching this project. While I found reading John Owen's treatment of the subject challenging, I also found it insightful. As a result, I was greatly encouraged in my own prayer life, knowing that the Holy Spirit himself would give me the desire to pray when I do not feel like it, and the ability to pray when I am at a loss of what to say.

In addition, while studying about the Lord's Prayer and studying Psalm 51, I believe I gained a stronger view of the majesty and greatness of God. I spend more time now delighting in his attributes and mighty acts. Knowing that I am calling on God as my Father, yet he is my Father who reigns in heaven, has added a deeper sense of awe to my prayers.

Finally, while I had already discovered the value of using Scripture to pray, my experience in this deepened significantly over the course of the project. Like many others, I often lacked faith in my praying and often got distracted. After reading Matthew Henry's book on ordering prayer by Scripture and using Don Whitney's book on praying the Bible, I often find myself more frequently choosing a psalm or promise from the Bible and letting it guide my personal prayer time. As a result, I sense that my walk with the Lord has deepened.

Personal Reflections

Pursuing a DMin and implementing this ministry project has been a fruitful and challenging endeavor. There were times that I felt overwhelmed and wondered whether I had made a wise choice in spending so much time and resources on it. In hindsight, I would say that it was a wise choice. I believe I have grown in grace and wisdom as a result of this process. As a result, I believe I have grown deeper in my walk with the Lord, and I have grown more effective in my ministry role at my church.

One of the ways I have grown is in my ability to communicate effectively. Being forced to clearly state a thesis and then defend it helped me be clearer in my weekly teaching and preaching ministries at the church. I believe it also enhanced my everyday communication in person and electronically. I still have a lot to learn, but I believe these three years have exponentially advanced my effectiveness in oral and written communication.

Spiritually, I am thankful to say that my own prayer life has deepened as a result of researching and implementing this project. Before I began, I was convinced of the necessity of a deep prayer life for church leaders to be godly and lead effectively. At the end, I am even more convinced. I personally experience greater joy and less frustration in prayer than I used to. I have also seen this result in those who took part in the class.

Conclusion

It has always been a priority for me and my senior pastor for FBC to be a praying church. As I began this journey, I realized that the best place to begin equipping a church to pray is with the leaders. Our church will not be a praying church unless our leaders are praying people. Over the last couple years, I learned a lot about what a deeper prayer life should be, and I am thankful that I got to pass that on to some of the wonderful FBC lay leaders. I especially enjoyed reading the work of John Owen and discovering the many facets of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in prayer. I am thankful to see that the purpose of the project was achieved and the goals were met. A t-test of dependent samples showed that there was statistically significant growth in the prayer lives of the lay leaders who went through the curriculum. I am also thankful that many of the participants testified verbally about how profoundly the class impacted them. Their excitement in change and discovery was refreshing. My hope is that the impact of this project will continue to yield fruit in my life, their lives, in our church, and in anyone else

who may benefit from the insights found here.

APPENDIX 1
CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOL

The Curriculum Evaluation Tool was used to evaluate the course materials. It provides eight questions to evaluate whether the curriculum meets appropriate standards regarding biblical accuracy, scope, teaching methodology and practical application.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
Notes, class activities, and assignments are sufficient to meet the goal of each lesson.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum provides adequate practical tools to grow in the spiritual discipline of prayer.					
The curriculum sufficiently motivates participants to move from information to application.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 2
PRAYER SURVEY

This survey was administered to leaders at First Baptist Church in Sevierville, Tennessee, to gather research data regarding whether the ministry project equipped the church's leaders in the spiritual discipline of prayer. It was administered before and after teaching the eight-week curriculum.

PRAYER SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

First Baptist Church Sevierville exists to glorify God and make disciples by helping people move from their point of need to hope in Christ. An essential element of that mission is prayer. A praying church begins with praying leaders, which is why we are seeking to equip leaders to deepen their prayer lives.

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the prayer lives of lay leaders at First Baptist Church. This research is being conducted by Craig Mintz for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project as part of a Doctor of Ministry program. In this research, you will be asked to answer questions about your prayer life. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research. To encourage transparency, this survey will be completed anonymously before and after the class. To accurately compare your surveys, you will be assigned a 4-digit code.

Date: _____

Your 4-digit code: _____

Use the scale below to indicate your response. For example, if you disagree, write “D”. If you strongly agree, write “SA”, and so on.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

____ 1. In a typical week, I set aside time each day for prayer.

____ 2. I am confident that I am pray in a way that pleases God.

____ 3. First Baptist Church Sevierville has trained me to pray well.

____ 4. I feel well prepared to train others to pray.

____ 5. When I pray, I use the Bible as a starting point or model for my prayers.

____ 6. I would describe my prayer life as “healthy” and “growing.”

____ 7. Sometimes I feel that my prayers are merely reciting a list.

- ____ 8. I often feel closer to God when I pray.
- ____ 9. I usually feel very focused when I pray and am not easily distracted.
- ____ 10. I regularly include praise and thanksgiving in my prayers.
- ____ 11. I am aware of the Holy Spirit's help when I pray.
- ____ 12. I regularly include confession of sin and repentance in my prayers.

Interview Questions

1. What is the most important thing that you have learned about prayer from the Bible?
2. What is the most confusing thing you've learned about prayer?
3. What do you feel like is the greatest weakness in your prayer life?
4. What do you feel like is the greatest strength in your prayer life?
5. What is the most comforting promise of Scripture about prayer?

APPENDIX 3
T-TEST RESULTS

T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	52.11764706	61
Variance	46.73529412	22.5
Observations	17	17
Pearson Correlation	0.612905316	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	16	
t stat	-6.74449993	
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.35499E-06	
t Critical one-tail	1.745883676	
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.70998E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.119905299	

APPENDIX 4
CLASS CURRICULUM

This curriculum was taught over a period of four weeks to lay leaders at First Baptist Church in Sevierville, Tennessee, for the purpose of deepening their prayer lives. This appendix shows the notes that were taught from and distributed to each participant.

Deeper Prayer Curriculum

Course Introduction: “Deeper Prayer” is an 8-session course designed to equip you as a lay leader in our church to grow deeper in your prayer life. As a believer and church leader, prayer is essential to who you are and what you do. Therefore, each session aims to give you biblical insights and practical tools to deepen this essential spiritual discipline.

Deeper Prayer Session 1: Pursuing God in Daily Prayer

Big Idea: Developing a daily habit of prayer is essential to a deeper prayer life and healthy relationship with God.

Key Verse: “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” – Colossians 4:2 ESV

What is prayer?

Most believers understand that prayer is communicating with God. To grow deeper in prayer, however, we need to expand this definition.

Discussion: Read the following quotes about prayer. Which of these, in your opinion, best defines scriptural prayer and why?

- *“Prayer is the act of asking God to do what he has already promised to do, which is modeled throughout the Bible by the patriarchs, the psalmists, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles.”* – J. Gary Miller (Professor at Queensland Theological College)
- *“Prayer is designed to adjust you to God’s will, not to adjust God to your will. If God has not responded to what you are praying, you may need to adjust your praying to align with God’s agenda. Rather than focusing on what you would like to see happen, realize that God may be more concerned with what He wants to see happen in you.”* – Henry Blackaby (Author of Experiencing God)
- *“Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or, according to the Word, for the good of the Church, with submission, in Faith, to the Will of God.”* – John Bunyan (17th Century English Pastor and author of The Pilgrim’s Progress)

- *Prayer “is the vital breath of our spiritual life unto God.”* – John Owen (17th Century English pastor and author)

Discussion: Pair up with a partner and discuss how you would personally define prayer for a brand-new Christian who has never been in church and knows virtually nothing about prayer.

How does daily prayer impact the life of the believer?

- Daniel 6:10 (ESV) – “When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.”
- Daniel remained faithful to God under incredible pressure in a culture that was opposed to the one true God. Steadfast prayer was so vital to his life in God that he refused to stop praying even under threat of death. Steadfast prayer is not optional for believers. It is essential to a healthy relationship with God.
- Read Colossians 4:2 – We are commanded to continue steadfastly in prayer. Make it a habit and never give up. Prayer is the means by which we daily depend on God for everything from forgiveness of sins to provision of food to spiritual protection.

Discussion: What are the consequences of neglecting daily prayer?

How do you establish a daily habit of pursuing God in prayer?

1. Set and guard a regular block of time. If your schedule allows, mornings are ideal.
2. Identify a location that will be relatively free from distraction.
3. Tell a brother or sister in Christ about your plans. Hold one another accountable.
4. Start with Scripture. If you’re reading your Bible daily, that is the place to begin in prayer. Respond in prayer to what you have read.
5. If you need some structure, consider models like the ACTS acronym. A = Adoration. C = Confession. T = Thanksgiving. S = Supplication.
6. Consider leaving your phone or other devices in another room.

Discussion: What other suggestions might you give to someone who wants to establish prayer as a daily habit?

Prepare for next time:

1. Read Chapters 1-3 of “Praying the Bible” by Donald Whitney.
2. If you already have a daily prayer habit, write down one thing you will commit to do this week to strengthen your pursuit of God in prayer.
3. If you don’t already have a daily prayer habit, write down when and where you plan to begin one this week and the name of one person you will tell about it for the sake of accountability and encouragement.

Deeper Prayer Session 2: How the Holy Spirit Helps Us Pray

Big Idea: Prayer can be challenging for various reasons. Believers can be encouraged that the Holy Spirit helps them grow in deeper prayer.

Key Verse: “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplications.” – Zechariah 12:10 KJV

Prayer is sometimes challenging for me. Where do I turn for help?

The Holy Spirit, who is God Himself, dwells within each person who has repented of sin and put their faith in Christ as Savior and Lord (1 Cor 12:7). According to Scripture, one of the ways the Holy Spirit works in believers is that He helps us pray.

Discussion: Have any of the following challenges been a struggle for you regarding prayer? If none of these feel familiar to you, are there other challenges you can think of?

- “Sometimes, I just don’t feel like praying.”
- “Sometimes, I struggle with what I should say.”
- “Sometimes, my mind wanders and I spend my time thinking about other things.”
- “Sometimes, I feel like I just repeat the same old things over and over again.”

John Owen, an English pastor from the 17th century, in his work *A discourse of the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer* notes some of the following observations about the Holy Spirit’s activity in the prayer lives of believers:

1. He gives us the grace and desire to pray.

- “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplications.” – Zechariah 12:10 KJV
- Owen notes that Titus 3:6 records the fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10. Paul writes that the Holy Spirit was “poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” (ESV)
- If you lack the desire to pray, seek God for the grace and desire that He promises through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

2. He reminds us of who we are and who our Father is.

- “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” – Galatians 4:6
- We, as believers, adopted into the family of God. We are made God’s children through the work of Christ and we pray as God’s children through the work of the Spirit.
- The Spirit enables us to pray in a way that is both relational and reverential as we relate to God as our Father in heaven. The Spirit helps us pray with freedom and boldness because He reminds us that we are praying to our Father and not a distant and uncaring God.

3. He intercedes for us when we don’t know what to pray.

- “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with

groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts 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 (ESV)

- The Holy Spirit mercifully intercedes on our behalf in alignment with God’s will because we are weak and often don’t even know what to pray for. He guides us to pray for matters like our own sanctification, the fulfillment of God’s promises, and deeper faith. He has also inspired Scripture, which helps us to pray.

4. He examines our hearts in prayer.

- “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” – Psalm 139:23-24
- The Holy Spirit searches us and reveals to us any sin in our lives so that we may confess it and find forgiveness and cleansing.

5. He helps us pray at all times.

- “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” – Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)
- The Spirit enables us to pray in any situation throughout the day making us aware of how we should pray for “all the saints.”

Discussion: Which of these truths encourage you the most and why?

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force, but is God Himself. The Bible teaches that there is one God eternally existing as three persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Watch this 2-minute video from Lifeway’s The Gospel Project titled “How Can One God Be Three Persons?”** Just like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is God. When Christ ascended into heaven, God did not abandon us. He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. Let that great truth prompt you to worship. Be encouraged by His abundant help in prayer.

What should I do now?

1. Thank God for the gift of prayer and for the help of the Holy Spirit in prayer.
2. Acknowledge your own shortcomings in prayer and ask for God to help you through the power of the Holy Spirit within you.
3. Delight in your relationship with God, who is your Father in heaven.
4. Ask the Spirit to show you anything in you that displeases the Lord and immediately confess it finding forgiveness and cleansing in Christ.

Prepare for next time:

1. Read chapters 4-6 of “Praying the Bible” by Donald Whitney.
2. Read Jesus’ teachings on the Holy Spirit in John 14:15-26 and John 16:12-15.

Deeper Prayer Session 3: How Scripture Helps Us Pray

Big Idea: Believers can become discouraged in prayer because they get distracted or don't know how to pray. Using Scripture to prompt prayer helps believers have a deeper prayer life by helping them focus and pray according to God's will.

Key Verse: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory." – 2 Corinthians 1:20 ESV

Do you ever feel like you just pray the same old thing about the same old things?

Discussion: How has Dr. Whitney's book on Praying the Bible helped you so far? What insights have you gained?

Watch this 5-minute video from Dr. Whitney about how to pray the Bible. Now, choose a psalm and use it to guide you in prayer for the next five minutes.

1. God gives us examples in Scripture of how to pray:

- The Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 is a great place to start. Also consider the Psalms.
- Moses – Exodus 33:11-18. Moses, on the grounds of God's undeserved favor, prayed for God's presence, to know God, to be taught His ways and to see His glory.
- Hannah – 1 Samuel 1:9-18. With a broken heart, Hannah poured her heart out to the Lord that He would remove her barrenness and give her a son.
- David – Psalm 31:1-5. David, when in danger, sought refuge and salvation in the Lord.
- Jesus – John 17:20-23. Jesus prayed for His future followers to be one so that the world would believe that the Father had sent Him.
- Paul – Colossians 1:9. Paul prayed for the church of Colossae to "be filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God." (CSB)

Discussion: Which of these five examples inspires you the most to seek a deeper prayer life?

2. God shows us in Scripture what we should pray about:

- Adoration (Worship)
- Confession
- Thanksgiving
- Supplication (Humbly asking God)
- Acronym for memory: ACTS
- Matthew Henry's *A Method For Prayer* orders prayer in this way using Scripture. He marshals various Scripture to assist us in adoration, confession, petition, thanksgiving, intercession, and conclusion. It is a

great resource for you to consider purchasing as you seek to pray the Bible.

3. God gives us promises in Scripture to prayerfully believe and receive:

- “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” – 2 Corinthians 1:20 ESV. In and through Christ, we can be assured that God will fulfill all of His promises to us. We can be assured that we are praying according to God’s will as we ask God to fulfill His promises.
- Consider the following four promises:
 - a. Philippians 4:6-7
 - b. Romans 10:13
 - c. James 1:5-8
 - d. James 4:7

Discussion: What promise in Scripture could you use to guide your prayers this week and why would you choose it?

What should I do now?

1. Begin each daily prayer time in God’s Word. Use the psalms to guide you in prayer.
2. Meditate on the promises in God’s Word. Pray over them in Jesus’ name.

Prepare for next time:

- Choose a biblical promise or a psalm to guide your prayer time on at least two days this week. Make a few notes about how it went and be ready to share next week.
- Read Chapter 7-10 of *Praying the Bible*.

Deeper Prayer Session 4: Prayer That Pleases God

Big Idea: Jesus taught his disciples how to pray in a way that pleases God. Using his example prayer and heeding other biblical instructions will help believers develop a deeper prayer life.

Key Verse: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” James 4:3 ESV

Discussion: Share any insights you gleaned from using a psalm or biblical promise to prompt prayer last week. How did it help you? Did you face any challenges?

Do you ever wonder if you are praying rightly in a way that pleases God and is according to His will?

1. Pleasing prayer begins with God

- Read Matthew 6:9-10
- “Our Father in heaven” – God is our Father. We come to Him in relationships and with reverence. He is *our* Father. In our individualistic culture, remember the biblical teaching that we together are the body of Christ.
- “Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done” – We are petitioning God to cause His name to be regarded as holy. He does this as we submit ourselves to His kingship and decrees.

2. Pleasing prayer is fueled by faith

- Read Hebrews 11:6
- Pleasing God requires believing Him and trusting Him. In prayer, this looks like belief in His existence and His promise to reward those who seek Him. This isn’t prosperity gospel teaching – “If you just believe it and speak it, God will do it.” It is calling on God to act according to His character and promises.
- Pray that God will make you holy as He is holy. Pray that God will heal your sickness. Pray that God will strengthen you to stand firm when the enemy attacks.

3. Pleasing prayer is offered in Jesus’ name

- **Discussion:** What does it mean to pray in Jesus’ name?
- John 14:13-14
- When we pray in Jesus’ name, we pray with His authority and according to God’s will for His glory. It is not a magic phrase stuck at the end of a prayer to manipulate God.

4. Pleasing prayer has right motives

- James 4:1-3
- Ask! We don’t have because we don’t ask.
- But ask with right motives. Do you pray with the intention of sin in your heart or to glorify and obey God?

- **Discussion:** What is an example of praying with wrong motives?
- 5. Pleasing prayer is never for show**
- Matthew 6:5-8
 - Pray to seek God and not to impress others.
 - Pray from the heart rather than with repetitious words or phrases that you believe will move the hand of God.

Discussion: What is missing from this list? What other factors are essential for praying in a way that pleases God?

What should I do now?

1. Take a moment to pray silently in light of these truths. As you pray, ask God to help you evaluate whether your prayer life is pleasing to Him.

Prepare for next time:

1. Use Matthew 6:9-13 to guide your prayers every day this week. Record how God is deepening your prayer life.
2. Read Appendix 1 and 2 from *Praying the Bible* this week.

Deeper Prayer Session 5: Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving

Big Idea: A deeper prayer life is more than just expressing personal needs to God. It should be marked by praise and thanksgiving.

Key Verse: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” Psalm 103:1-2 ESV

Discussion: Of all God’s attributes, what excites you the most? Holiness, love, majesty, patience, might, or something else?

If you’re married, how would your marriage be if your only verbal communication was expressing your needs to your spouse? Terrible! Conversation with your spouse in a healthy marriage should include delight in one another. Our prayer lives are deeper when we delight in God with praise and thanksgiving.

1. Prayer is worship

- We are communicating with no ordinary being. If we have a true sense of who God is, we will be compelled to worship Him as we draw near to Him in prayer. As we delight in who He is and what He has done, even our personal petitions become worship. The things we ask for, we ask for the glory of God’s name.
- “God’s chief end, purposed in all that he does, is his glory (and what higher end could he have?), and he has so made us that we find our own deepest fulfillment and highest joy in hallowing his name by praise, submission, and service.” – J.I. Packer – *Growing in Christ*
- **Activity:** Read Psalm 103 and then write your own prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

2. Thanksgiving builds faith

- As we give God thanks for what He has done, we are reminded of His goodness and faithfulness. Our faith is strengthened to believe that God is who He says He is and He will do what He has said He will do. Thankfulness for faithfulness past will strengthen faith in His future faithfulness.

Discussion: Read Psalm 100. Besides your salvation and your family, what is one specific thing that you can thank God for today?

3. Our prayers are shaped by who God is

- When we believe that nothing is impossible with God, our faith is strengthened and we surrender to Him completely. (Genesis 18:14; Luke 1:37-38)
- When we believe God is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us of our sins when we confess them, we are quicker to confess our sins. (1 John 1:9)

- When we believe that God is working all things to our good, we are able to trust difficult and confusing situations into His hands. (Romans 8:28)

Discussion: Think back to the attributes of God that we discussed at the beginning of this lesson. How else might the attributes of God shape the way we pray?

What should I do now?

1. Spend some time in prayer thanking God for anything you can think of.

Prepare for next time:

1. On your day off from work this week, carve out some extra time for prayer. Read Psalm 146 and let this psalm lead you into an extended time of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

Deeper Prayer Session 6: Prayers of Confession

Big Idea: Believers seeking a deeper prayer life must confess their sins to God on a regular basis.

Key Verse: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” – 1 John 1:9 ESV

Discussion: Why do we sometimes neglect confession in our prayers or only give it a cursory mention?

1. Confession and repentance remove barriers to effective prayer

- “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” – Psalm 66:18 (ESV)
- 1 John 1:6 makes clear that we are lying if we claim to walk in close fellowship with God while also walking in darkness. Walking in darkness indicates a sinful way of life that is unrepentant and does not seek to confess and kill sin.
- Read Ezekiel 14:3, 1 Timothy 2:8, 1 Peter 3:7, & Proverbs 21:13. Are you walking in the darkness of some unconfessed sin? Take a moment now to confess it and receive forgiveness and cleansing in Jesus’ name.

2. Confession is hypocritical if we harbor an unforgiving spirit ourselves

- “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” – Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV)
- This truth is illustrated in Matthew 18:21-35. A genuine experience of God’s forgiveness is evidenced in our forgiveness of others. The massive weight of our sin was washed away by the cross. We show that we have not truly believed and experienced this if we persist in unforgiveness toward others.
- Are you holding a grudge? By God’s grace, forgive now.

3. Confession reminds us of the gospel and our need to trust Christ daily

- “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” – 1 John 1:8-10
- Our sins past, present, and future are fully and finally forgiven when we repent and place our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. 1 John was written to believers. True believers abide in Christ and therefore confess their sin daily. To ignore our sin or say we haven’t sinned is an indication that we have not been saved to begin with.

- We can confess with faith because confession is built on the character of God (1 John 1:9). He is faithful. He will never fail to forgive those who truly repent and come to Him through faith in Christ. He is just. He is freely just in forgiving our sins because they were paid for by Jesus on the cross. He has not simply dismissed them.

A Brief Examination of Psalm 51

- Besides Psalm 51, other “penitential psalms” include Psalms 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, and 143.
- In Psalm 51, there is an earnest confession of sin (vs. 1-6), a petition for restoration (vs. 7-12), and a commitment to call others to repentance (vs. 13).

Discussion: Read Psalm 51. Which of these verses seem most helpful for your own prayer of confession and why?

Prepare for next time:

1. Read Psalm 139:23-24. Make a list this week of every one of your sins that the Holy Spirit brings to mind. Get specific and leave nothing out. Confess it to God thank Him for His forgiveness.

Deeper Prayer Session 7: The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Warfare

Big Idea: Seeking God’s protection and help in the face of spiritual attack is essential to a deeper prayer life.

Key Verse: “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” – Ephesians 6:18 ESV

Discussion: Read 1 Peter 5:8-9. Spiritual warfare is real. The enemy is scheming against you so that we might falter in the faith. How does prayer help us resist the enemy and stand firm in the faith?

1. We should pray for deliverance from evil.

- “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” – Matthew 6:13 (ESV)
- Satan is not equal with God. He is a created being. He is the “father of lies” (John 8:44). Jesus is the victor!
- Read John 17:15-19. Primarily Satan works against us by seeking to deceive us. Jesus prayed for us to be kept from the evil one. How? By sanctifying us in the truth of God’s Word.

Discussion: What lies are we often tempted to believe and embrace?

2. Prayer enables us to wage war spiritually.

- “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.” – 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 Divine power to destroy what has formerly held us captive is accessed in prayer.
- Read Ephesians 6:10-20. It is in prayer that we embrace and enjoy the gifts of God that are truth, righteousness, salvation, faith, the Word of God, and the gospel.
- “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” – James 4:7
- In prayer, we submit to God, and receive and take ownership of His benefits. Notice the order of James 4:7. We are not obsessed with the enemy. We are aware of him and so we focus our eyes on God. When we submit and resist, the enemy must flee!

3. Evangelism and missions are aggressive spiritual acts. We must pray!

- Look again at Ephesians 6:19-20. Paul is asking the church to pray a prayer of spiritual aggression. Pray that he would be bold in proclaiming the mystery of the gospel. When souls are won to Christ, the enemy loses.
- The enemy seeks to silence the church through fear. In prayer, Christ overcomes our fear through the work of the Holy Spirit and we receive boldness to speak the truth of the gospel to those who are perishing.

Discussion: What lies does the enemy tell us that lead to a lack of boldness in our gospel witness? Read Acts 4:23-31. Partner up with someone else to pray salvation and boldness. Pray for the salvation of people you know who are lost. Pray for God to make you bold in your gospel witness.

Read Psalm 3. With this psalm of deliverance in mind, take a few minutes to write out your own prayer of deliverance. Include ways that you have been under attack spiritually or lies that the enemy has tempted you to believe.

Prepare for next time:

1. Read Psalm 18 this week and use it to guide you in your own prayer for spiritual protection and victory.

Deeper Prayer Session 8: Frequently Asked Questions

Big Idea: The subject of prayer sometimes raises questions and causes confusion. To deepen our prayer lives, we should understand what the Scripture says about these questions.

Key Verse: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”
– Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV

1. If God is omniscient and sovereign, why do we pray?

- We do not pray to inform or instruct God. We pray in obedience to his command enabling us to cooperate with Him in advancing His kingdom. We pray so that we may express faith in Him and His promises and depend completely on Him.
- The Lord, in His wisdom and goodness, has ordained that He works in response to our prayers.
- “You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.” – 2 Corinthians 1:11

2. Does God accept the prayers of non-Christians who call on Him?

- God is eager to hear the prayer of every sinner who looks to Him in faith for salvation. Romans 10:13.
- Verses like Psalm 34:15 and John 9:31 indicate that God refuses to hear the prayers of an unrighteous person who does not trust in Him.

3. Is it necessary to fast with prayer?

- Read Matthew 6:16-18. Jesus assumed that His followers would fast but fasting is not named as a necessary condition for acceptable prayer.
- Fasting is never for show. That is hypocritical.
- Fasting is not manipulative as if we persuade God to do something through a hunger strike. It is a way for God’s people to temporarily deny enjoying God’s good provision so that we may more earnestly seek Him and trust in Him as our greatest treasure.
- Nehemiah 1:1-4 & 2 Samuel 12:16.

4. Does prayer ever change God’s mind?

- Read 1 Samuel 15:29, Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17.
- Prayer changes things but it does not change the mind of the Lord. The Lord does not change His mind. He is eternal and unchanging. He brings about change, however, in response to the prayers of His people.
- But what about passages like Jonah 3? God has sovereignly purposed that through the threat of judgment, the Ninevites would repent and turn to God.

5. Should I pray to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, or all three?

- The normal pattern that Scripture teaches is to pray to the Father (Matthew 6:9) in Jesus' name (John 14:13-14) by the help of the Spirit (Jude 20-21).
- Stephen prayed to Jesus to receive his spirit. (Acts 7:59)

Discussion: What other questions do you have about prayer? What is one big takeaway for you from these eight sessions on deepening prayer?

Close the class with a time of prayer together.

***Before you go:** Take the brief survey.

Why does God call us to persevere in prayer?

- Read Luke 18:1-8
- The Lord knows what is best and when it will be best. We may pray according to His will in Jesus' name, but we should trust that His timing is best.
- Our persistence in prayer pushes us to trust God's wisdom and timing. It is also a time for us to deepen our dependence on Him.
- “⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” – 2 Cor 12:8-10
- Daniel 10:1-14 – 21 days of prayer!

How is John 14:14 true?

- “Jesus is not promising to be a personal vending machine; rather, He is encouraging confidence and faithfulness in prayer. When Jesus says to pray “in my name,” He means that we can pray in His authority. He has provided the access we need to heaven. When our requests, made in the name of His Son, further God's purposes and kingdom, God will act on our behalf, and in the end the Father will be “glorified in the Son” (John 14:13). A good example of such a prayer is Christ's in the garden where He prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

In the old American West, before the days of credit cards, a shopkeeper would maintain a ledger book recording the activities of each customer's account and the amount owed. The business owner knew his customers well and the work in which they were involved. A customer would at times send others to the shop for him to make purchases and bring back materials needed for his home or business. Those sent in the customer's stead (e.g., his children) would be able to receive the goods “in the name of” the account owner. But, if they tried to purchase things not in line with what the shopkeeper knew the customer needed or wanted, the purchase would be denied.

Coming to God in Jesus' name is similar to those old financial transactions. Jesus holds the account, and we are welcome to come to the Father in Jesus' name to receive what we need. The Father willingly grants our requests because of Jesus' standing. Of course, if we are asking for things that we don't need or that are contrary to the character or will of Christ, then we cannot expect to receive those things (see James 4:3).

When He said He would give "whatever you ask in my name," Jesus was not delivering a magical formula for getting whatever we want. He was giving us a guiding principle to align one's desires with God's. When we pray "in Jesus' name," we pray according to the will of God; we pray for what will honor and glorify Jesus. God will provide the means necessary to accomplish His objectives, and He equips us as His servants. Ultimately, God receives all the glory and praise for what is done." – gotquestions.org

How do I pray for someone to be saved when they have free will to deny Christ?

- ²⁴ And the Lord's servant²⁴ must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.
– 2 Tim 2:24-26

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ABSTRACT

DEEPENING THE PRAYER LIVES OF LAY LEADERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH SEVIERVILLE, TENNESSEE

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
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This project seeks to deepen the prayer lives of lay leaders at First Baptist Church in Sevierville, Tennessee. Chapter 1 gives the context, rationale, purpose, and goals for the project. It also includes the research methodology, definitions, and limitations. Chapter 2 details exegesis of two biblical passages (Matt 6:9-13; Ps 51) to demonstrate how the Bible can be used to equip lay leaders to have a deeper prayer life. Chapter 3 shows how writings from Puritans John Owen and Matthew Henry can aid those who seek to grow deeper in their practice of prayer. Chapter 4 describes the execution of the project giving details about curriculum content and implementation. Chapter 5 gives an evaluation of how well the project met the specified goals and what can be learned as a result.

VITA

CRAIG STEVEN MINTZ

EDUCATION

BA, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998
MDiv, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001

ORGANIZATIONS

Leadership Sevier

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Interim Pastor, Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, Warne, North Carolina, 1997
Youth Pastor, First Baptist Church, Andrews, North Carolina, 1998
Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Westwego, Louisiana, 2000-2002
Church Planter, International Mission Board, Berlin, Germany, 2002-2003
Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Sevierville, Tennessee, 2005-