



Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Live life as a disciple of Christ and intentionally make disciples for the glory of God.

Lesson 2 Prayer and Grace

Day One

Unanswered and Answered Prayer

In Lesson One, we studied about achieving high-level positions in God's kingdom. Jesus taught what it meant to seek prominent positions in God's economy and not the world's. He wanted His followers to recognize that being great in God's kingdom means sharing in Christ's suffering, not dominating others, and offering compassionate service to others.

We also studied how crucial prayer is for followers of Christ. Communicating with God is key to discipleship. We need His direction to move forward and succeed in Christian living. Both God the Father and God the Son desire our prayers and desire to answer them. However, sometimes communication is difficult—God may not answer our prayers in the way desire, or not at all.

It can be disheartening when we feel God is not answering our prayers. Depending on the situation, we may wonder if God really loves us or cares about our pain. Our emotions can run away with us, keeping our focus on ourselves rather than on God.

When you are concerned about unanswered prayers, be patient. God's timetable is different from ours. It may be that He has already granted your request, and it will come to pass in the future. We often need to slow down, especially in a world where many of us are always in a hurry.

We have this "fast-food mentality"—we want it now! Concern over unanswered prayer can be an opportunity to practice trust and patience. However, there are times when God may choose not to respond to a particular prayer. In such cases, it is important to examine ourselves and consider why God might be silent. Here are five reasons God may not answer our prayers. While this list is not exhaustive, it offers insights into possible reasons for unanswered prayers.

Five Reasons God May Not Answer Our Prayers

(1) Not putting God first in our lives.

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the importance of putting God first in our affections. We are commanded in the Old Testament not to have anyone, real or imagined, to come before God (Exodus 20:2–3). Although God is gracious in dealing with humanity, if we are not making God

#1 in our lives, we are not worthy of being Jesus' disciple. Only disciples who remain in the Father and the Son can appropriate (claim) Jesus' promise for having prayers answered.

1. According to Matthew 22:37–38, the first and greatest commandment is loving God with all our hearts, souls, and minds. Why or why not would you consider this the same as putting God first?

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.” Matthew 22:37–38

2. Read Luke 14:26. Explain what Jesus is saying about being His disciple.

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:26
(The Hebrew word for hate denotes an Israelite view of covenantal choice requiring single-minded loyalty in discipleship—we are to love others less than God.)

3. Read John 15:7. What is the condition for having prayers answered?

If you remain in me [Jesus] and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. John 15:7 (Remain in Jesus is to stay connected to Him through faith, obedience, and dependence, allowing His life and teaching to guide and sustain us.)

When God is first in our lives, everything else should fall into place with our prayers being answered. In fact, the remaining reasons God does not answer prayer could be subcategories of not putting God first. Nevertheless, we are going to list four other reasons God may not answer our prayers and set them in their own categories. Here is the second reason.

(2) Rebellion and disobedience to the Lord and His commands. This includes engaging or keeping sin in our minds and thoughts.

4. Read Deuteronomy 1:45. The Israelites had rebelled against the Lord's command. What was His response to them?

You came back and wept before the LORD, but he paid no attention to your weeping and turned a deaf ear to you. Deuteronomy 1:45 (Read Deuteronomy 1:29–46 for full explanation.)

Read Psalm 66:17–20 and answer questions 5–7:

I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue.¹⁸ If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;¹⁹ but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer.

²⁰ *Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!* Psalm 66:17–20 (Cherish means to retain a memory or wish in the mind as a source of pleasure or ambition.)

5. When David cried out to the Lord, what was on his tongue (v. 17)?

6. If David had cherished sin in his heart, would the Lord have listened and answered him?
Yes No (Underline One)

7. Since David had not cherished sin in his heart, how did God respond (vv. 19–20)?

The third of the five reasons God may not answer prayers has to do with our seeking help from anyone or anything other than the Lord. The Israelites provide an example. Instead of relying on God their King, they asked for an earthly king to lead them. The prophet Samuel warns them below in 1 Samuel 8:18 below.

(3) Forgetting the Lord’s provision and seeking help, protection, or resources elsewhere.

8. Read 1 Samuel 8:18. What is the prophet Samuel’s warning to the Israelites?

When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day. 1 Samuel 8:18 (Israelites preferred an earthly king over God.)

God has a purpose for the world and for us. When we seek the Lord’s will, He will help us follow it by answering our prayers. But as the fourth reason states, when we do not care what God’s purposes are, we are foolish, and God is not responsive to foolish people.

(4) Not trying to understand God’s purpose or desiring it.

9. Read Ephesians 5:17. How are people described who do not understand the Lord’s will?

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Ephesians 5:17

10. According to Proverbs 16:3, what will the Lord do when we commit our actions to Him?

Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. Proverbs 16:3

The fifth and final reason God may not answer prayer is wrong motives. Why *are* we seeking God? If God answers our prayer, will He be glorified? Or are we only thinking of ourselves and what we desire?

(5) Praying or asking God for things with selfish or wrong motives.

11. According to James 4:3, why do some people not receive answers to their prayers?

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. James 4:3

12. Review the five reasons why God may not answer your prayers. Which one is the most challenging for you and why?

13. Regarding your answer to #12, what will you do this week to better your prayer relationship with God and how did it work out?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #12–13 with your discipleship team.

Having intelligent and sincere talks with God is amazing. However, we need to approach God in the right way, for the right reasons, and for the right things. Think, for a moment, of a child rudely asking his father to take him out for ice cream . . . *immediately*.

14. What is wrong with the child's demanding his father take him out for ice cream?

The father would like to take his child out for ice cream, but the child's attitude is rude and disagreeable. The child should show his father respect and politely ask him for the favor. We can learn from the ice cream example and remember it is best to approach God with love and respect. No one makes demands on God, nor should He ever be treated in a flippant or frivolous way. We submit to Him in all things. God is not only our Father, but the sovereign ruler over the universe.

Christians are immensely blessed to be in relationship with our triune God, but relationship does not mean we treat God like our earthly family or friends. It is a different kind of relationship and although we use our human relationships as analogies, all comparisons fall short of the reality and immensity of our God.

It is incredible to read in the Bible that the all-powerful, all-wise, and all-knowing God desires a relationship with us. He invites us to be part of His heavenly kingdom and family. Jesus makes the point clear when he refers to God as the disciples' *heavenly* Father (Matthew 5:48, 6:14, 26, 32). As disciples of Christ, God is our heavenly Father, too.

Our heavenly Father longs for us to seek His presence because of who He is, not merely for what He can do for us. He also desires that we approach Him with a sincere heart and a genuine desire to honor Him in our requests.

Scripture is filled with encouraging words from our Father in heaven. After examining our hearts, motives, and actions toward Him, we can confidently turn to God's remarkable

promises—those given to His people in the Old Testament and the additional promises revealed through Jesus in the New Testament. As disciples of Christ, we are heirs to both.

15. According to Isaiah 58:9a, what happens when the Lord’s people call out to Him?

Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
Isaiah 58:9a

16. Read Isaiah 65:24. How soon will the Lord answer His people’s prayers?

Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. Isaiah 65:24

17. Read Matthew 6:8. Does your heavenly Father know what you need before you ask Him?
Yes No (Underline One)

Do not be like them [pagans], for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
Matthew 6:8 (Jesus teaches prayer should be sincere, not mindless repetition like the pagans’ “babbling.”)

These verses remind me when our ministry, Prison Alliance, first began distributing Christian books and Bibles to U.S. prisons. We accepted donations of gently used Christian books and Bibles and upon opening such a box we found a *Korean Bible*. I asked my husband, Anders: “What are we going to do with this?” He didn’t know.

We **prayed** about it and placed the Korean Bible on the bookshelf in our basement. We were operating the ministry from our home at this time.

Just days later, Anders called a prison chaplain to offer free Christian materials. The chaplain eagerly accepted and, before ending the call, asked, “By the way, you wouldn’t happen to have a *Korean Bible*?”

Years later, a man from Charlotte arrived at our offices with several boxes of books. Before he left, he grabbed one of the books and said apologetically, “I don’t know what you’re going to do with this.” It was a *Russian Bible*.

I replied, “Oh, I don’t know either, but God does. He knows the exact person who needs this *Russian Bible*.” Of course, I told him the story of the *Korean Bible* and we **prayed** together for God to use the Bible for His glory.

The very next day, we received a letter from an inmate in Colorado requesting a *Russian Bible*!! God answered before we had even asked (Isaiah 65:24).

—End Day One—

Day Two

Praying Hyde and Prayer Walking

We learned five reasons our God may not answer prayer and we also looked at encouraging verses about God answering our prayers. In either case, it is wise to read and study the context surrounding the verses. This will give us a fuller understanding regarding what God is promising or not promising. Knowing God's Word will keep our faith strong and hope alive by giving us accurate expectations.

Definitions: *Context* is defined as the text surrounding words, phrases, or passages that come before and after a particular word, phrase, or passage. It helps explain its full meaning.

Contextual is the "meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, passage, etc., as it stands in relationship to the larger literary context, from a sentence to the entire book of the Bible."¹ To take something "out of context" means to give it a meaning that ignores the overall writing, work, or situation.

Action Step

18. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in reading the book of Isaiah, chapter 30. Based on the context, how would you apply or understand verse 19?

People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Isaiah 30:19

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #18 with your discipleship team.

Knowing context is important for many reasons. For example, I learned how the context can be manipulated a long time ago when I published a magazine. The local media would interview me and then use only certain sentences or phrases for their stories. They would not air or write the intention of my words, but just the parts of the communication that fit their narrative. Many times they used my interview to tell their predetermined story.

The "sound bites" gave a different meaning than I had intended. These manipulations can happen in any kind of media or communication, even including general conversations with friends. Sadly, the Bible can be misused in the same way, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Even though it is God's Word, the Bible is still a large work of literature (writing). The protestant Bible is made up of 66 books, covering a period of about 3,500 years. It is estimated that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch (pen-tuh-tyook),

¹ James D. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics* (Springfield, Mo: Gospel Publishing House, 2005).

sometime during his 40 years in the desert (1446–1406 BC²). Because of its length, time period, and number of authors, the Bible can and is open to misuse—even abuse.

19. Who is *the* “abuser” of Scripture and an expert at taking it out of context for his own purposes (Genesis 3:4–5; Matthew 4:6, 16:23; Mark 4:15)?

There are about 31,000 verses in the Bible (23,000 in the Old Testament and 8,000 in the New Testament). Our enemy, the devil, knows this Book much better than we do and is extremely happy to help us misunderstand any of those 31,000 verses. His goal in doing this is to keep people in bondage by causing division, sin, and much heartache. Pray against his schemes in your life and ours!³

Satan has not only been around for at least 3,500 years, but he also has a powerful intellect. On our own we are no match for him either in physical strength or brain power. We need to rely on someone stronger and smarter than he. *We must rely on God!*

Action Step

20. Memorize 1 John 4:4 to remember your strength and wisdom come from the Holy Spirit living in you (John 14:16–17.) Note: Both the Father and Jesus also dwell within believers, as seen in Galatians 2:20 and John 14:23.

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 1 John 4:4

Accountability: Be prepared to share your memory verse with your discipleship team.

We must rely on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us in reading and interpreting Scripture. He will help us understand the context of a verse and how we can apply it to our lives. The Holy Spirit will also quicken (make alive, stir) verses that have special meaning for us during particular times in our lives. God speaks through His Word by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Other than studying the Bible, one of the best ways to learn about prayer is to read nonfiction books on the subject and biographies of men and women who were devoted prayer warriors. Pray and ask God to bring you a book on prayer that will help you know, love, and communicate with Him better.

John ‘praying’ Hyde is an example of one devoted to prayer. He served the Lord in the early 1900s and is remembered for his famous and heartfelt cry: “Give me souls, oh God, or I die!”⁴

² BC is the symbol meaning “before the birth of Christ.” AD is the symbol that means “in the year of our Lord” and is taken from the Latin term Anno Domini. Some authors and publishers prefer to use BCE meaning “before common era” and CE for “common era.”

³ Deaf Missions: <http://www.deafmissions.com/tally/bkchptrvrs.html> (accessed 5/14/2015).

⁴ Captain E. G. Carre’, *Praying Hyde* (New Jersey: Bridge Publishing, Inc., 1982). Most of the information about John Hyde that follows has been gleaned from this resource.

John grew up in America in the state of Illinois where his parents were devoted followers of Christ. John headed to seminary in 1892, and it was during this time that prayer became His calling and a strong feature of his life and work. He prayed for all the students individually by name and took time to meet with many. It was said of John that he was a torch of prayer—his soul a flame that carried light and warmth.

He went to India as a missionary and continued his life of prayer. The author E.G. Carre' writes, "His prayer life was one of absolute obedience to God. I remember once the lunch bell sounded when we were in the prayer room. I heard him whisper, 'Father, is it Your will that I go?' There was a pause, and when the answer came, he said, 'Thank You, Father,' and rose with a smile and went to lunch."

"At one time John Hyde was told to do something and he went and obeyed, but returned to the prayer room weeping, confessing that he had obeyed God unwillingly. 'Pray for me, brethren, that I may do this joyfully.' We soon learned afterward that he had been led to obey triumphantly. Then he received the promise that he would be the (spiritual) father of many children, an Abraham indeed."

"If we are willing to put ourselves into God's hands, then God is willing to use us. But there are two conditions: obedience and purity. Obedience in everything, even in the *least*, surrendering up our wills and taking the will of God. And the next step is purity. "God wants pure vessels for His service, clean channels through which to pour forth His grace. He wants purity in the very center of the soul, and unless God can have a pure vessel, purified by the fire of the Holy Spirit, He cannot use that vessel. He is asking you now if you will let Him cleanse away part of your very life. God must have a vessel He can use."⁵

21. How is God calling you to a new level of commitment in obedience and purity?

22. How will you cooperate with God in reaching this new level of commitment in obedience and purity?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #21–22 with your discipleship team.

John had difficulties when he arrived at his new missionary post in India—he faced persecution from the natives. He and other missionaries then formed the Punjab Prayer Union where they set aside half an hour a day to pray for spiritual revival. In 1908 he told the conference that he had "laid hold of God in a very definite covenant." It was for one soul or conversion a day.

"Three hundred sixty-five people converted, baptized, and publicly confessed Jesus as their Savior. Impossible—yet it happened. Before the next convention, John Hyde had prayed more

⁵ Ibid., 24–25.

than 400 people into God's kingdom, and when the prayer union gathered again, he doubled his goal to two souls a day. Eight hundred conversions were recorded that year, and still Hyde showed an unquenchable passion for lost souls.

At the 1910 convention, those around Hyde marveled at his faith, as they witnessed his near violent supplications, "Give me souls, oh God, or I die!" Before the meeting ended, John Hyde revealed that he was again doubling his goal for the coming year. Four souls a day, and nothing less. During the next twelve months John Hyde's ministry took him throughout India. By now he was known as "Praying Hyde," and his intercession was sought at revivals in Calcutta, Bombay, and other large cities. If on any day four people were not converted, Hyde said at night there would be such a weight on his heart he could not eat or sleep until he had prayed through to victory. The number of new converts continually grew.

It was in Calcutta that friends persuaded Hyde to see a doctor about his rapidly deteriorating health. The years of such strenuous effort had obviously taken a toll. Yet no one expected the medical examiner's incredible diagnosis. John Hyde's heart had shifted out of its natural position on the left side of his chest to a place over on the right. It was unlike anything the doctor had seen before, and he warned Hyde that unless he got complete rest he would be dead in six months.

In fact, Praying Hyde lived for nearly two more years, long enough to see a wave of revival sweep through the Punjab and the rest of India—and long enough to have his own personal vision enlarged. Before he died, he shared what God had shown him:

On the day of prayer, God gave me a new experience. I seemed to be away above our conflict here in the Punjab and I saw God's great battle in all India, and then away out beyond in China, Japan, and Africa. I saw how we had been thinking in narrow circles of our own countries and in our own denominations, and how God was now rapidly joining force to force and line to line, and all was beginning to be one great struggle. That, to me, means the great triumph of Christ. We must exercise the greatest care to be utterly obedient to Him who sees all the battlefield all the time. It is only He who can put each man (and woman) in the place where his life can count for the most.⁶

John 'praying' Hyde's life bears witness to the power of prayer. No matter what kind of kingdom work we are engaged in, it must start and end with God. Through prayer, God transforms people, circumstances, and the world around us.

Most of us are familiar with praying while kneeling, sitting, or standing. However, have you tried *prayer walking*? This is simply praying while you are walking. You can walk and pray alone or with one or more persons. The amount of time you spend in prayer walking should be determined by God, your prayer team, and you. Here are three ways you can engage in prayer walking.

⁶<CBN.com:http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/PrayerAndCounseling/Intercession/praying_john_hyde.aspx<(accessed 6/15/2015).

First, we might take a quiet walk and commune alone with God. This can be a sweet time, stimulating our senses and heightening our experience with God. There may be trees, shrubbery, or flowers that smell sweet and are lovely to the eye. A cool or warm breeze may brush our faces and blow through our hair reminding us of God's presence and His Holy Spirit.

A second form of prayer walking is to intercede for people and situations on our path. Even if we do not know a person along our route, we can seek the Holy Spirit's leading in bringing their needs before the Lord. In the same way, we may pass an area that is walled or hidden from sight. Ask the Spirit how to pray for those who live, work, or frequent that enclosure or dwelling.

Third, we can go to battle while prayer walking. The intent is to take strongholds and territory back from the devil. This type of prayer walking is a form of spiritual warfare targeting and evicting evil and demons from our communities.⁷

Your Action Steps this week, or as soon as you can schedule them, include three different prayer walks. The first walk is for you alone. However, the other two prayer walks include other disciples. Most prayer walks, unless you are communing with God, include one or two other prayer partners. If large numbers of people are prayer walking, they would usually be divided into threes. In this way, it is easier to hear your prayer partners and for everyone to voice their prayers.

Action Steps

23. Contemplative (thoughtful) Walk. Prepare your heart to talk, listen, and worship God. Share your experience.

24. Intercessory Walk. Ask God who He wants to join you and where to walk. Share the purpose with your prayer partners and prepare your hearts to pray. Share your experience.

25. Spiritual Warfare Walk. Ask God who He wants to join you and where to walk. Share the purpose with your prayer partners and prepare your hearts to pray. Share your experience.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #23–25 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Two—

⁷ Dictionary of Christianese, <http://www.dictionaryofchristianese.com/prayer-walk-prayer-walking/> (accessed 5/15/2015).

Day Three

Purpose of Prayer

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God conveys a strong rebuke to His people. Yet even in His sternness, God's words are rooted in love, as He reveals the reason for His anger. His message offers the Israelites an opportunity to reflect, listen, and turn from their sinful ways toward righteousness.

Read Jeremiah 4:22 and answer questions 26–30:

“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.” Jeremiah 4:22

- 26. Why does God say His people are fools?
- 27. Why does God say His people are senseless children?
- 28. God says His people are skilled at doing evil because:
- 29. How can the Israelites become wise, sensible children, and skilled at doing good?
- 30. How are God's words through the prophet Jeremiah still effective for people today?

The Israelites in Jeremiah's time had no excuse for their ignorance of God. The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed God's revelation to them, and they had access to the Scriptures, including the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Bible that we discussed earlier. They were also familiar with the teachings of Moses, which served as a powerful example of seeking and knowing God.

Read Exodus 33:13–14 and answer questions 31–33:

*If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”*¹⁴ *The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”* Exodus 33:13–14

- 31. Why did Moses want God to teach him His ways (v. 13)?
- 32. How did the Lord answer Moses' prayer (v. 14)?

33. Why would it be difficult to love and follow someone you do not know?

34. Read Hebrews 11:6; 1 John 3:1 and 2 John 1:9. How do *you* know the Lord is pleased with you?

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

1 John 3:1

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 2 John. 1:9

God is pleased with those who believe in Him and earnestly seek Him. Therefore, God does not reward atheists. Last night, I happened upon one of Dr. Sean McDowell's YouTube videos. His guest was a journalist and an atheist. Sean is an apologetics professor at Biola University in La Mirada, California. He tackles difficult questions about Christianity and faith on his YouTube channel. In this particular segment, they shared respectful conversation about God and culture.⁸

Interestingly, the guest atheist admitted that one of the difficult things about believing in God was that he had no sense of who God was or what He was like. In response, Sean suggested that he read the book of John to get to know Jesus. Getting to know Jesus will help us know God because Jesus said, *"If you really know me, you will know my Father as well"* (John 14:7).

When Jesus finished speaking, Philip, asked Him to show the disciples the Father and that would be enough. To which Jesus replied, *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9a). If we, or someone else, are having trouble knowing or imagining God, seek His Son through the pages of New Testament. As we get to know Jesus, we will get to know God the Father.

35. Based on today's study, what do you think is an important purpose of prayer?

36. Read and meditate on Psalm 32:8–9. What is God saying to you?

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. ⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Psalm 32:8–9

⁸ An Atheist Journalist Interviews a Christian Apologist (with Adam Davidson)>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntF0H30FBWI><(accessed 9/7/2022).

God created human beings for His glory (Isaiah 43:7). It would be difficult, if not impossible, to glorify God without knowing Him. We would not understand the good He desires of us and would end up doing evil. From the Scriptures we studied today, an important and even prime purpose of prayer, is to know God, His character and His ways. Prayer enables us to fulfill the reason for which we were created.

Knowing God is a life-time pursuit. We will never completely know God because He is beyond our total comprehension—He is incomprehensible. In other words, although we can know God personally through Jesus Christ, we cannot fully understand His immense intellect and power.

But we can increasingly know God's character, ways, and plans for our lives. Moses understood this. When called to lead a great nation, he did not rush into action. Instead, he paused to pray, humbly asking God to teach him so he could know and please Him. Moses recognized that knowing God was essential for fulfilling his calling.

As followers of Christ, we are also called to lead—whether by pointing others to Him or by encouraging fellow believers to serve Him more fully. Our identity as disciples is deeply rooted in the promises of God. Through Christ, we are counted as Abraham's descendants, inheriting the blessings and responsibilities of that covenant (Genesis 12:2–3; Galatians 3:8–9, 14, 26–29). To live out this calling, we must remain in constant communion with God. Only through consistent prayer and reliance on Him can we be equipped to serve as faithful disciples and heirs of His promise.

Action Steps

36. Where do you think your strength lies in praying to God?

37. Where do you think your weakness lies in praying to God?

38. What might be a personal goal in improving your prayer life with God?

39. How can your discipleship partners hold each other accountable for personal goals in improving your prayer lives?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #34–39 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Three—

Day Four
Gift of Empowerment

God works in response to our calling upon Him. Prayer is an important aspect of how God may work in our lives and hence an important part of receiving God's grace. We call on God to save us from sin, enemies, sickness, affliction, trouble, and heartache.

However, prayer is not always about us. There are many ways that we ought to pray. In general, we should pray for other people, the church, countries, and the world. However, one area of prayer is particularly difficult for most people—praying for our enemies.

Although Job's "friends" were not his enemies, they were critical and judgmental of his situation. Instead of offering comfort in his affliction, they argued with him and made harsh assumptions. In doing so, they misrepresented God—who heard everything they said.

God rebuked them, saying to Eliphaz, *"I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has"* (Job 42:7). To make amends, God instructed them to bring seven bulls and seven rams as a sacrificial offering. God also asked Job to pray for his friends so they could receive His forgiveness.

40. Read Job 42:10. What happened to Job after he had prayed for his insensitive friends?

After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. Job 42:10

David had real enemies and he prayed for them. His heart of compassion is inspiring as we will see below. However, in David's situation he eventually had to pray for God to rescue him from those same enemies.

41. Read Psalm 35:13–14. What are your thoughts regarding David's prayers for his enemies?

Yet when they [David's enemies] were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, ¹⁴ I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother. Psalm 35:13–14

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #40–41 with your discipleship team.

Read Matthew 5:44–45 and answer questions 40–43:

Note: Various Bible translations, such as the NIV, NLT, and NAS translate the Greek word *eulogeo* (εὐλογέω) in Matthew 5:44 as "pray." *Eulogeo* means to call down God's gracious power on someone, request God's favor for them, speak well of them, or bless them.

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Matthew 5:44–45

42. What does Jesus command us to do (v. 44)?

43. How does loving and praying for our enemies make us children of our Father in heaven (v. 45)?

Jesus understands that it is challenging to pray for those who offend us and even more difficult to pray for those who torment us. However, doing so reflects the character of God and shows that we are His true children. After commanding us to love and pray for our enemies, Jesus says, *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matthew 5:48). Meeting the demands of this command requires a perfection similar to that of our heavenly Father—a perfection that can only be achieved through God’s grace.

44. Read Luke 23:34. How did Jesus model praying for His enemies?

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. Luke 23:34

In Day 3, we looked at how Moses desired to know God and to continue to find favor with Him. The Hebrew word *hen* (חֵן) in the verse, Exodus 33:13, is defined as favor or grace. Grace is a word that can be used of God’s favor to us and of our favor to another. It is used in various ways in the Old and New Testaments. For a further study on the word grace, see Unit 3: Christian Leadership, Lesson 6: *The Leader’s Fire of Holiness*, Day 2.

Finding favor or grace is a Semitism⁹ (Genesis 6:8, 18:3; Judges 6:17) and a common Old Testament expression (Genesis 33:9–10). It was used in the everyday life of the Hebrews. Depending on the context, finding favor or grace could mean that a person is showing kindness to someone or someone is pleased with the kindness he has been shown.¹⁰

Read Isaiah 30:18 and answer questions 45–46:

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! Isaiah 30:18

45. How does the Lord long to be toward you?

⁹ This means that it is a Semitic word or idiom (expression). Semitic refers the Semites (includes the Hebrews), their language and culture.

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Volume 1:1:1–9:50* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994), 111.

46. When we wait for God to be gracious to us, how does Scripture describe us?

Definition: *Grace* is God's divine power in action to undeserving people.

God may extend His grace either as a result of our prayers or as an expression of His sovereign will and purposes. Regardless of the method, we are the recipients of His benevolent care and power. God's grace empowers us to follow in Jesus' steps in every way He commands and desires (Hebrews 4:16; 2 Peter 1:3–4).

Are you fearful? God's power works to make you fearless. Are you weak? His power strengthens you. Are your relationships broken? God's power restores them. Whatever is lacking in our Christian lives, God's divine power is freely available to make up the deficit. It was through God's grace that we were saved in the first place and began our journey of discipleship.

God works in our lives even when we are not actively seeking Him or cooperating with His plans. However, some aspects of His grace—such as salvation—require our acceptance. While we may never fully comprehend all of God's ways, we can gain deep insights through His Word. It is essential to take the knowledge He has revealed to us in Scripture and put it into practice.

This leads us to consider two approaches to experiencing God's grace: (1) when we actively pray for His favor and (2) when He extends His grace apart from our requests.

God's Grace: Two Approaches

(1) Praying for God's Favor

God responds to our prayers and petitions, as seen in the story of Hannah. Her name in Hebrew, *Channah* (חַנָּה), is translated “grace” or “favor” in English.)

Read 1 Samuel 1:10–11 and answer questions 47–49:

In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. ¹¹And she made a vow, saying, “LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.” 1 Samuel 1:10–11

47. What did Hannah, in deep anguish, pray for (v. 11)?

48. Did Hannah deserve to have a baby? Yes No (Underline One)

Hannah was childless in a society where a woman's value depended upon childbirth in marriage. She had been ridiculed for not having children and in her devastation called on the Lord. Now, just because she was sad and forlorn does not mean that she deserved to have a child. No one on earth warrants God's favor or merit.

49. Since Hannah was barren, what was the only way that she was going to conceive?

God delights to act in accordance with our faith. Hannah did not place her trust in herself, her husband, her relatives, or even the idols that were widely worshiped during her time. Instead, she recognized that her only hope for having a child rested in God's power and provision. With unwavering faith, she sought Him in prayer, knowing He alone could fulfill her deepest longing.

Read 1 Samuel 1:19–20 and answer questions 50–51:

Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her.²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him." 1 Samuel 1:19–20 (The Hebrew name, Samuel, means either Name of God or Heard of God.¹¹)

50. How did the Lord answer Hannah's prayer (v. 20)?

51. Why did Hannah name her son Samuel (v. 20)?

God's grace does not depend on our bargaining power, but if we do make a bargain like Hannah did, we need to keep our word. Hannah obediently did what she had promised and gave her son, Samuel, to Eli the priest for him to raise and train in the ways of the Lord.

(2) Not Praying for God's Favor.

God also acts on His own initiative, even without our prayers, as demonstrated in the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her name, derived from the Hebrew name *Miriam*, may carry meanings such as "beloved," "rebellious," or "myrrh." (Myrrh is a fragrant resin used in ancient times for anointing, embalming, and as a symbol of suffering and purification, often associated with deep spiritual significance and given as a gift by the Magi to Jesus.)

Read Luke 1:27b–33 and answer questions 52–54:

The virgin's name was Mary.²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." Luke 1:27b–33

¹¹ <<https://www.abarim-publications.com/meaning/samuel.html>>(accessed 9/19/2022).

52. What were the angel's first words to Mary (v. 28)?

53. After the angel told Mary she had found favor with God, what did he tell her (vv. 31–33)?

54. Did Mary ask God if she could be the mother of His Son? Yes No (Underline One)

There is no record in the Bible of Mary praying to be the mother of God's Son. There is no record of anyone praying in that regard because no one really fathomed God's plan. There are prophecies in the Old Testament about Christ, but how many understood the extent and ramifications of Jesus' birth, life, death, or resurrection? It is only now, through the New Covenant, that we understand God's plan.

God took the initiative, through His Holy Spirit, to make Mary the mother of His Son. She was not worthy of such an honor. No one is deserving of such an honor.

In the same way, none of us are worthy to partake of God's plan of salvation. He took the initiative to send His Son to die on a cross for the punishment of our sins. Through God's divine power, He worked and effected (brought about) salvation for all humanity.

Salvation is a combination of the two examples of grace. God took the initiative, but we must accept and act in faith. In other words, we have done nothing to deserve the gift of salvation but we must tell God we want to be saved. We accept God's divine grace to save us from our sins by calling on Him (Romans 10:13).

Every aspect in the Christian life is due to grace. We need to place ourselves under God's rule and will so we do not hamper His divine working in our lives. Remember in Day One we looked at the reasons God may not answer our prayers—these reasons apply to God's grace not working in our lives also. We do not deserve His grace, nor should we presume (assume, take for granted) on it either. God's grace is for His glory, not for our satisfaction.

55. Write a definition of God's grace in your own words.

56. List any aspect of *your* Christian life that you are not relying on God's grace and what you will do about it?

57. How will this lesson on prayer and grace strengthen your walk with the Lord?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #55–57 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Four—

Day Five

Responsibility and Effort

Every aspect in the disciple's life and all Christian theology is related to the doctrine of grace. We need to be aware of God and His grace in order to act according to His will. We need to place ourselves under God's rule so we will not hamper His divine workings in our lives.

We must trust, obey, and depend on God for what He has done, is doing, and will do on our behalf from Creation to End Times. Therefore, choosing and living according to God's revealed Word opens our lives to Jesus and His power. Living a holy, disciplined life according to the teachings of Jesus Christ is what discipleship is all about.

Read 2 Timothy 1:8–10 and answer questions 58–60:

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me [Paul] his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹ He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 2 Timothy 1:8–10

58. Who saved you and called you to a holy life (vv. 8–9)?

59. Why did God save and call us to holy lives (v. 9)?

60. How has God's grace been revealed to us (v. 10)?

Read Titus 2:11–12 and answer questions 61–62:

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age . . . Titus 2:11–12

Definition: *Self-control* is the ability to regulate one's emotions, desires, and behavior, particularly in challenging situations, to achieve discipline and restraint.

61. What does grace teach us (v. 12)?

62. How does grace and self-control work together (v. 12b)?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #61–62 with your discipleship team.

Self-control is a gift of grace—God’s divine power working in us—providing the determination and strength to live self-controlled lives. Our role is to cooperate with God’s grace and the Holy Spirit, as self-control is also a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). With God’s help, we *can* manage ourselves. Grace and self-control work together as we accept both the gift of grace and the Holy Spirit. Once we recognize these gifts, we use our will and mind to practice discipline and control in our lives.

63. Read 1 Corinthians 15:58. How does a disciple of Christ use God’s grace to stand firm?

Definition: To *Stand firm* is to be steadfast, firm and settled in one’s thinking or belief. It also means to be strong and immovable while holding one’s ground.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58

64. Read James 2:17. What does our faith require of us?

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2:17

65. According to James 2:26, can you have faith without good deeds? Yes No (Underline One)

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James 2:26

66. How do you live by God’s grace and yet put effort into training yourself to be godly?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #63–66 with your discipleship team.

Effort, self-control, and training can become wearisome. Responsibility and leadership can be lonely. Even born again, Spirit-filled disciples get tired and weary from doing good. Sometimes we become physically, emotionally, or mentally sick.

When any of these things happen, either you or those you are discipling may have real and tender feelings of loss, abandonment, or rejection. You may even feel unloved by family, friends, and even God. It might be difficult to press on and forward—you might feel stuck.

The apostle Paul understood what it was like to grow weary and lose heart. He understood discouragement and even despair. That is why he encouraged believers not to give up.

Read Galatians 6:9–10 and answer questions 67–68:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:9–10

67. How does the apostle Paul recognize that believers become weary (v. 9a)?

68. Why should disciples continue doing good and not give up (v. 9b)?

69. Read 2 Corinthians 1:8. Paul's good work attracted enemies and troubles so severe that he and his co-workers despaired of life itself. What is another way of stating their condition?

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 2 Corinthians 1:8

Being a disciple of Christ does not mean we will not have issues in life to deal with. If we are in ideal physical health, our circumstances are positive, and our minds function perfectly, we have a great deal to be thankful for. But we do live in a fallen world and most people will have a combination of physical, emotional, or mental issues that they must contend with at some time or another in their journey with Christ.

70. Describe any physical, emotional or mental problems that you dealt with in the past and explain how you have been freed to press onward with Jesus.

71. Read Philippians 3:12–14. How do the words of the apostle Paul encourage you in your responsibility and self-discipline?

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12–14

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #70–71 with your discipleship team.

Read Matthew 11:28–30 and answer questions 72–74:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I [Jesus] will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28–30

Definition: Literally, a *yoke* is a wooden crosspiece that is fastened over the necks of two oxen or horses and attached to the plow or cart that they are to pull. A *yoke* is also used as a metaphor for bondage or servitude. To take Christ's *yoke* upon us is to humbly do His will and allow Him to guide and direct our lives.

72. Who does Jesus call to Himself (v. 28)?

73. Who do we learn from, and who gives rest to our souls (v. 29)?

74. Why do you think Jesus says His yoke is easy and His burden is light (v. 30)?

Although Matthew 11:28–30 is the call to those weary and burdened by guilt and sin, it is also a call from the burden of the law or works (Acts 15:10), and from trials and troubles of life (John 16:33). Jesus gives rest to all people who are loaded down in any capacity. Certainly, the first step is to lay down our sin and guilt and accept the righteousness that Jesus secured for us at the cross.

To take Jesus' yoke is to willingly submit to His authority. In this holy relationship, Jesus gives us grace to follow and obey Him. Our relationship with Jesus also gives us the ability to go to Him daily for comfort—the quality and kind comfort the world cannot give.

Although God is all-powerful and a God of miracles, He may not always answer our prayers in the way we expect. If we are ill, God may guide us through a lengthy recovery process to develop empathy for others. In matters of emotional health, He may lead us to seek medical help, Christian therapy, or continue in persistent prayer. Each situation is unique, just as with the apostle Paul. However, remain steadfast in your faith and continue seeking God for those miracles, trusting in His perfect timing and will.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 and answer questions 75–79:

... or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

75. Can you think of any reason that we are not given more specific details about the thorn in Paul's flesh, described as a messenger of Satan to torment him (v. 7)?

76. How many times did Paul beg the Lord to take away his affliction (v. 8)?

77. How did the Lord answer Paul (v. 9)?

78. What did Paul learn from the Lord's answer to his prayer to remove his torment (v. 9)?

79. Through Paul's experience, what lesson do *you* learn?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #75–79 with your discipleship team.

As a disciple of Christ, you may also have a thorn in your flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment you. These messengers delight in finding weaknesses and using them against us. Paul certainly had a lot to contend with. He was insulted, persecuted, and had other hardships and difficulties. However, Paul understood that God was working in his life to overcome this wicked tormentor and Paul would succeed.

Sometimes, the torment comes through relationships with family, friends, co-workers, and even church members. For example, you may be going through a divorce, or your fiancée (boyfriend/girlfriend) may have met and married someone else. These are agonizing situations.

Parent/child relationships are particularly painful and may also be fractured due to anger, abuse, or neglect. Perhaps a parent, child, or sibling may have died before your relationship could be restored. Or you may just have problems with relationships in general. God has made us relational people to find enjoyment in each other, but living in a fallen world disrupts His perfect design.

If you do have relationships that are chipped, cracked, or broken, do not despair. God's grace is sufficient. He is powerfully and lovingly working in your life and theirs. Keep those relationships and yourself before the Lord and anticipate a good outcome from your Father in heaven.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! Matthew 7:7–11

Christian Maturity Worksheet

Disciples are always growing and changing, making our walk with the Lord both exciting and dynamic. To attain the perfection we are called to, we must work in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Setting both short-term and long-term goals is essential to this growth.

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18

Present

- 80.** What actions are you currently taking to grow and mature in Christ?
- 81.** What do you consider to be the greatest challenge in your life right now?
- 82.** What personal vision or purpose has God impressed upon you?

Next Steps

- 83.** What is one personal goal you would like to achieve this year?
- 84.** What is one goal for your ministry or service that you would like to accomplish this year?
- 85.** What specific areas of discipleship do you feel you need to grow in, and how can you be supported in those areas?

Future

- 86.** Where would you like to see your life or ministry in 5 to 10 years?
- 87.** Do you have specific objectives or actions to help you achieve your long-term goals?
- 88.** List your strengths and weaknesses that God may want you to address to be fully used in His work to expand His kingdom and glorify His holy name.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #80–88 with your discipleship team.

—End of Day Five and Lesson 2—

Next—Lesson 3: Identity in Christ, Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

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