



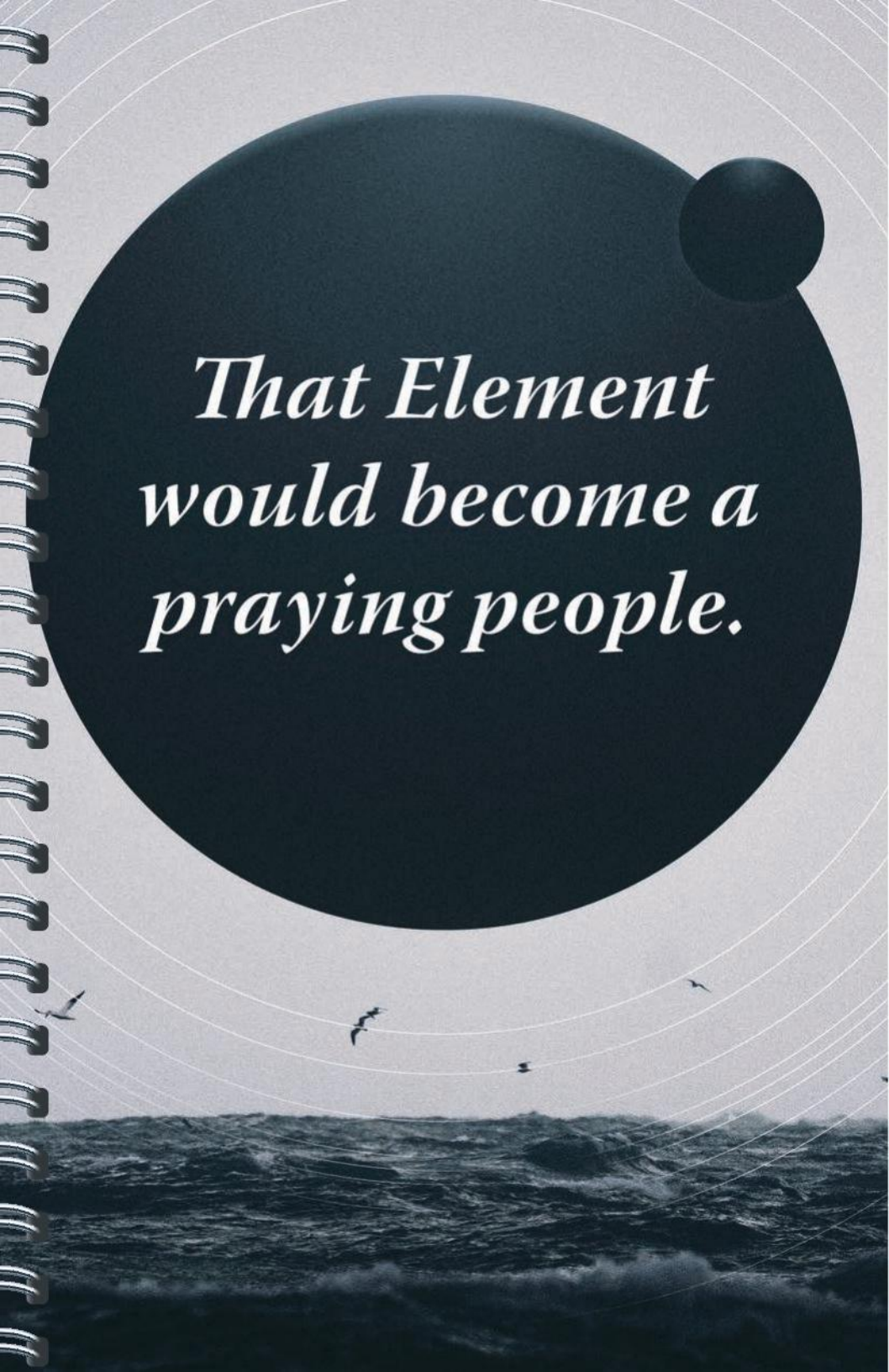
PRAYER

An Element Church Sermon Series

ourelement.org/prayer

- Greater awareness of God's presence, provision, and faithfulness
- Deeper understanding of Jesus' saving grace and appreciation of this good news
- More tangible expressions of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
- Renewed excitement and creativity related to living on mission
- Stronger engagement with our world—acknowledging the ongoing needs as well as what is good
- Vitality within the family of God
- A greater tendency to see prayer as a first response, rather than a last resort



The image shows the cover of a spiral-bound notebook. The cover has a light gray background with a pattern of thin, concentric white circles. A large, dark, circular shape is centered on the cover, and a smaller, similar dark circle is positioned in the upper right corner of the large circle. The text is written in a white, italicized serif font within the large circle. The notebook's metal spiral binding is visible on the left side. The bottom portion of the cover features a black and white photograph of a turbulent sea with white-capped waves and several birds flying in the sky above.

*That Element
would become a
praying people.*

WHY THIS BOOK

This booklet has been designed by our staff to help Element as a church understand prayer better. Our desire is that we would pray more often, pray more honestly, and experience a deeper intimacy with God Himself.

This series will be broken up into two parts. The first eight weeks will dive into what prayer is and isn't and will look at these topics:

- What prayer is/isn't
- Unanswered prayers
- Real prayer
- The "Lord's" prayer
- Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, & Supplication (ACTS)
- Ceaseless prayer
- Praying "in the Spirit"

In the second part, weeks nine through thirteen, we will look at specific prayers found in the Scriptures:

- A prayer by Abraham
- A prayer by the Psalmist Heman
- A prayer by Daniel
- A prayer by the Apostle Paul

Next Easter, we will also revisit prayer by looking at Jesus' prayer found in John 17.

This book is broken out in a weekly format with sermon summaries, daily verses with questions, prayer points, a Gospel Community section, a family section, and a kids section. We want this booklet to help in your prayer journey whether you are single, married, have children, or don't have children.

Toward the end of the booklet, you will find additional tools that are designed to help you grow in your prayer life and practice, such as:

- fasting in prayer
- intercessory prayer
- a simple guide to ceaseless prayer
- a Lord's Prayer template

Alongside this book, we also have dedicated prayer journals available, if you want one, as well as prayer bookmarks and home screen graphics for your phone.

Lastly, please understand that our relationship with God is not about rigorous rules we apply to ourselves to make us “feel” as if we are being spiritual. Some people may pray an hour a day while others may pray 10 minutes or less. Our goal, again, is to learn to be a genuine and honest people before our great God who has saved us. We want your relationship to grow in ways it never has before! We are hoping this journey together glorifies God and builds your relationship with Him.

WHY JOURNAL

There are many ways to interact with God and process His truth throughout the day. Many people enjoy the act of journaling, so we thought we would include some information to enhance your existing practice or help you strive toward a new habit!

Journaling is a form of processing through writing. It can be freeform or structured, but it is essentially putting thoughts to paper (or a screen!). It can look different from person to person—there is no right or wrong way to engage, as it is a creative exercise.

Many people find that the act of journaling allows them to integrate/organize their thoughts more easily. For some who may tend to ruminate, journaling may be a helpful tool for “offloading” thoughts so that they can feel more relaxed and present. Journaling also allows the writer to revisit old thoughts/needs/prayers and to see what kind of growth has taken place since starting this journey. While others may be more inclined to engage in verbal expression, journaling allows for a tangible, visual form of communication and expression that resonates with some personality types.

JOURNALING IDEAS

*We have a separate journal that can be purchased at the Welcome Center if you'd like...but, feel free to use any notepad/journal/app you'd like!

- Take the pressure off—in terms of the “right” format or frequency. Focus on what comes to mind and start writing.
- Play! Journaling is creative expression. Consider playing around with different formats, doodling in the margins, crafting songs, poems or other art from what you write...it's all acceptable and a way to connect to God.
- Consider your personal experience throughout this 13-week journey. What comes naturally? What is challenging? What feels awkward or exciting? What are you learning about your God-given inclinations regarding prayer?
- What prayer requests can you record? What answers have been received? What has your response been to those answered prayers?
- What new ideas for how to pray do you have?
- What are questions you want to discuss with God?
- What has God been revealing to you? What Scriptures are speaking to you lately?
- Write a psalm. Craft a psalm that speaks to your lament/confession/praise/thanksgiving/remembrance.
- Create your own liturgy. How can you creatively restructure a passage of scripture into a dramatic reading?
- Respond directly to a passage of scripture.
- What are your dreams for your family? Neighborhood? City?

EACH WEEK, YOU'LL FIND:

SERMON RECAP

Sermon Recap with Scripture References — a brief summary of that week's message that highlights specific aspects of prayer.



Prayer Starters — these are prompts for you to consider in your own prayers that week.



Weekly Exercise — this is an idea for you to put into action as you grow in prayer.



Community Discussion Section — these thoughts/questions are geared toward Gospel Communities to help them pursue growth in prayer together. If you're not in a GC, feel free to discuss these questions among your family or friends.



Daily Reflections — for 5 days each week, you'll get a Bible verse/passage, as well as a specific question to reflect on.



eKids Prayer Guide — this section will help those families with children to teach them more about prayer in a way that is appropriate for their ages. The eFamilies team will be preparing boxes of supplies for the activities, so make sure you pick up your boxes from Element! (See the next page for instructions).

EKIDS PRAYER GUIDE

INSTRUCTIONS

Teaching your kids about prayer can be simple and fun. Kids learn through play and concrete measures. To help, we have developed a plan to go along with what you, as parents/guardians, are learning while in service. This guide incorporates kid language and play that you can walk through with your children to help them learn.

Here is how this works. Each week has four parts:



First, there is a paragraph that is just for you, the facilitator, to read introducing a prayer concept.



Next, in the **ASK THIS** section, we've laid out some questions for you to introduce the concept to your kids. Everything that you, as the leader, say is printed in bold. If the item is not bolded, it is provided as either more detail or more instruction on how to implement that particular section.

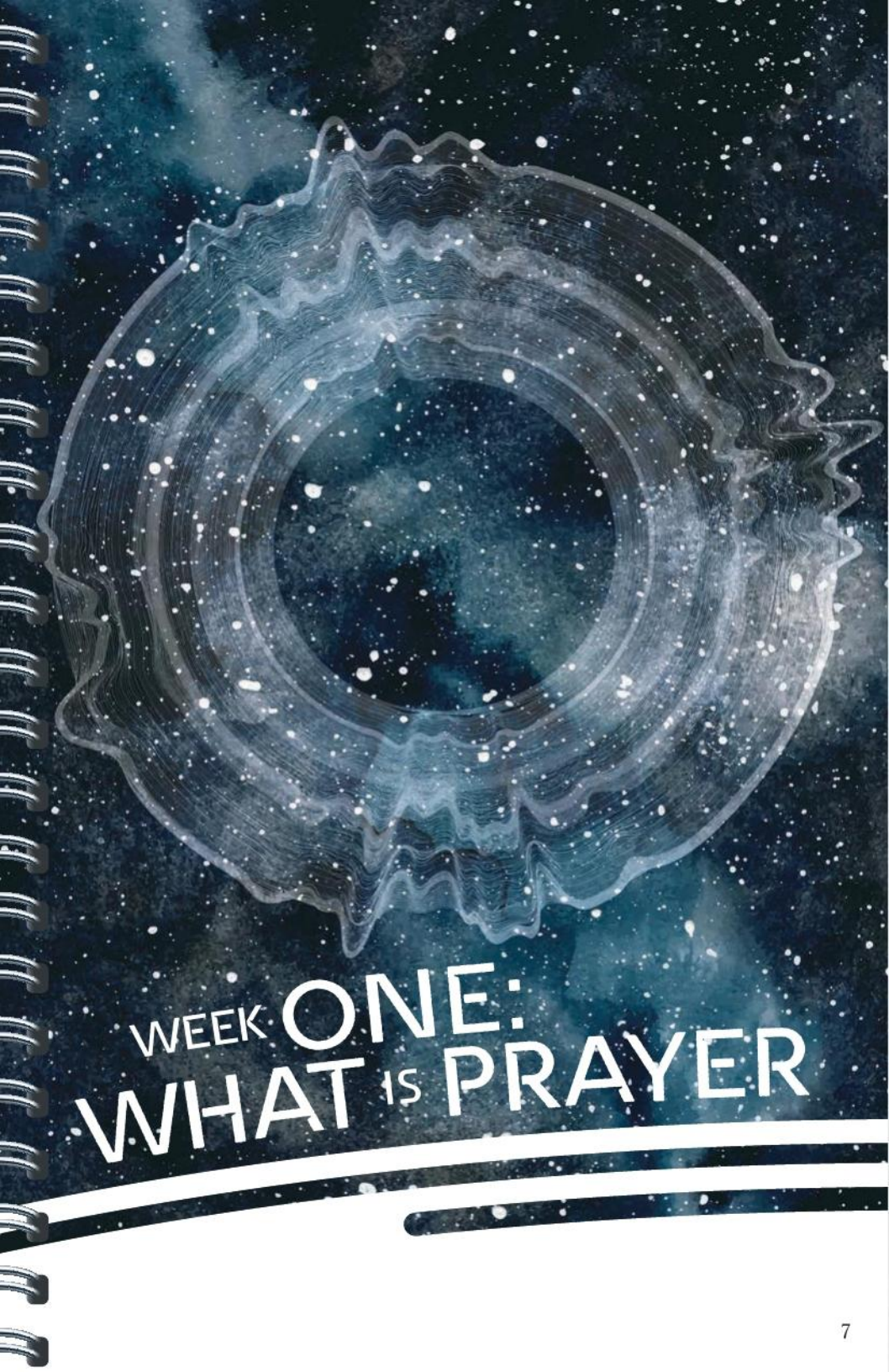


The **DO THIS** section has an activity curated for your family to bring the prayer concept to life in a more tactile and playful way. The instructions for the activity are in *italics*, and anything **bolded** is what you will say as the leader. To support your family with this section, eFamily has boxes with supplies for the entire series that you can pick up in the kids kiosk.



The **PRAY THIS** section is just that, pray as a family. You can use the words printed in bold, or use your own words. The important thing is that you get practice as a family praying out loud, together.

Enjoy this time as a family! Remember, parents/guardians are the primary spiritual teachers to their kids. Element is here to support you in any way possible. Best wishes on your prayer journey!



WEEK ONE:
WHAT IS PRAYER

SERMON RECAP

This week kicks off our sermon series dedicated specifically to prayer. There are many ideas about what prayer is or isn't throughout the world, and prayer can seem overwhelming or intimidating to a lot of people. However, the Christian faith is centered on a personal God revealed in Jesus Christ, and we are allowed to approach Him anytime and in full honesty through prayer! Prayer is not about our work, vocabulary, or righteousness; rather, it is about God's work in our hearts. As with any relationship, communication is central. By knowing who Jesus is and experiencing His grace, we are drawn into prayer with Him. It is also *through* prayer that we continually encounter Him and grow in faith and maturity.

Prayer is one of the most common phenomena of human life. The Bible teaches that prayer is not a way of purifying ourselves *for* God, but of relying on the grace of God to bring us into His presence.

Prayer is not *our* discovery or achievement but is *God's* work in man.

Prayer is not an inward journey to discover we are one with all things and God; prayer should lead to personal encounters with a personal God.

Prayer is communication with God, but we must take time to know who God is or we can make prayer about us.

Prayer should become a response to the knowledge of God. It means that our prayers will be altered by what we know and believe about who God is... meaning we have to know Him with some sense of accuracy. The moment we are born again by the power of the Gospel, through faith in Christ, God's Spirit moves us to understand that we are not simply God's subjects, but also His children—we get to converse with Him as our Father! The clearer our understanding of who God is, the fuller our prayers will be.

Prayer is a continuing conversation that God has started through His Word and provided by His grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with Him.

Jesus is *the* Word of God because there is no more comprehensive, personal, and beautiful communication of God that is possible.

PRAYER IS:

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*Personal,
communicative
response to
the knowledge
of God.*

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A continuing conversation that God has started through His Word and provided by His grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with Him.

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SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Isaiah 65:24

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Ezra 9:5

1 Samuel 1:1

Exodus 12:27

Job 1:20

2 Chronicles 20:19

Psalms 47:1

Psalms 95:6

1 Timothy 2:8

Romans 1:19-20

Galatians 4:6-7

John 1:1-4

Ephesians 2:18-21

PRAYER STARTERS

Here are some starter topics to help you direct your prayers...

Element – Gospel Communities: pray for current and future leaders, training, and coaching.

Personal Growth – Bible Reading: pray for the development of regular time spent in the Word.

World – Pray for the dismantling of tyranny, oppression, abusive power, and slavery.

Gospel Advancement – Pray for personal boldness in speech and deed, including having a reason for the hope you have (1 Peter 3:15).

WEEKLY EXERCISE

Join Element's prayer group on our Church Center App, called "Prayers of Element" to read other people's prayer requests throughout the week. You may also post your own prayer requests here.

<https://ourelement.churchcenter.com/groups/various-studies/prayers-of-element>



Use a separate journal or note book to journal through your prayers, God's responses, etc.

While we would like all our GCs to explore prayer throughout this series, please know that the questions and exercises included are just suggestions. We encourage each GC to follow God's leading when it comes to your gatherings, discussions, and prayer time.

Spend some time getting to know your group's comfort level with prayer (see questions below). Take some time to remind those in your community about the joy, freedom, and grace found in the Gospel and that this is a perfect season to take risks with one another without shame. Maybe you have a group where it tends to be the same few people that pray out loud each week. Encourage others in the group to give it a shot.

Remember that all of us are at different points in our prayer lives. It's important to celebrate even the smallest steps forward made in faith!

- How do you feel about praying out loud/in front of other people?
- How important do you feel prayer is to your spiritual life? To this community?
- What would help you grow more confident in prayer?
- How would you like to see our community grow when it comes to prayer?
- What are some of the most influential/powerful times of prayer you've experienced?
- What questions/doubts do you have about prayer?
- If you have surrendered your life to Christ, how has prayer become a true gift of God's Spirit?
- If you do not see it as a true gift, explore why that might be. Could there be some understanding that is misplaced?
- Do you want your prayers and communication with God to become more earnest? What might be your first step towards achieving this?
- What small steps of faith can you celebrate today?

Spend some time praying through Psalm 8 together.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



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

What are your hopes for this series through prayer? How do you want your prayer life to be changed?



Romans 1:19–20 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

What kind of communicator are you in general? How does that translate to your prayer life?



Galatians 4:6–7 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

What does it mean for prayer to be a response to God?

WEEK ONE; WHAT IS PRAYER



1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

What kind of obstacles keep you from praying more often?



Ephesians 2:18-21 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

We talked about a lot of different ways to pray according to Scripture this week. What new ways to pray would you like to try throughout this series?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDS PRAYER GUIDE

ONE: WHAT IS PRAYER



Who is someone that you talk to everyday, someone that you let into your life in a more personal way? Would you say that you are closer to that person than any other people in your life?

This is no different than how you build your relationship with Jesus! You are building a personal relationship with a personal God. And as parents, it's our responsibility not only to model that building process, but to facilitate it with our children as well.



ASK THIS: When you meet a new friend, how do you become better friends with that person? *You can give them suggestions but try to let your kids come to the answer on their own.* **Right, we talk; we tell them about ourselves and listen to the other person talk about his/her life. To build our relationship with Jesus, it's important to talk and listen to Jesus!**



DO THIS: Choose a time in your day to begin a new rhythm for your family. Choose a time when your whole family is consistently available and not in a rush. It might be during breakfast or dinner, or there may be another time of day that works. Just choose the best time for YOUR family. Find an old cell phone or toy telephone. **SAY: Praying to Jesus is just a conversation. You don't have to use fancy words. Praying isn't magic. You just talk and listen.** Using the phone as a prop, hold it up to your ear as if you are talking to Jesus on the phone. Tell Jesus one thing about your day, and then pause for 5-10 seconds, creating a space for Jesus to communicate with you. After those few seconds, hand the phone to the next person in your family. Continue this exercise until everyone has had a chance to "talk" on the phone.



PRAY THIS: Jesus, thank you for having the desire to be in relationship with my family. Lead us through this series to grow closer to you through our prayers.



WEEK TWO:
WHAT PRAYER IS NOT

SERMON RECAP

In order for us to have a deep relationship with God, we must know and trust who He is in His person. Too often, we make up who we want God to be and then worship *that* image as God. Rather than living in the truth that we are made in His image, we try to remake God in our image and that never goes well. One of our biggest obstacles to prayer is that often we are praying for what we want rather than what God wants for us.

We may be tempted to think God has to agree with us or He can't be God; but if God can't disagree with us, then He is not God. We must be pushed to see God's world as larger than our desires, and that means that when we pray, we must listen. God, many times, does answer...we simply fail to see how He answers. Tim Keller writes, *"The power of our prayers...lies not primarily in our effort and striving, or in any technique, but rather in our knowledge of God."*

We don't "pray" because God is lonely. God is complete in Himself; He does not lack anything.

We don't "pray" because God is a tyrant or because we think He is like us. Nothing lures us further away from God than not understanding who God is. We worship God because we see who He is as He has revealed Himself.

We don't "pray" because we think God is a vending machine. This concept is known as a "functional savior" theology. We think some "thing" will bring us happiness, so we strive to get that "thing" and will use any means (including God Himself) to get it.

We don't "pray" because we think we are the most important being to God. If we were more important to God than God, He would become an idolator and cease to be God.

We don't "pray" because we think God loves us more than He loves Himself or His glory. The life we have comes graciously from His hand. We are saved because God is true to His character.

WEEK TWO WHAT PRAYER IS NOT

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PRAYER becoming “a continuing conversation that God has started through His Word and provided by His grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with Him” means that our view of it changes:

- From complaint to confession – We confess what is wrong in us in honesty, so we see God’s goodness compared to our sinfulness. We don’t pray merely to complain, but to honestly confess who we are.
- From appeals to praise – When we move from complaining to confession we will naturally move from merely appealing to God for things, and move to praising God for what He has given. We do ask God for things because He is God, but truly seeing God as He is moves us from trying to get things from Him, and into a life that praises who God is in all things.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Psalms 143:1-2

Isaiah 65:24

Job 42:5

Hebrews 1:1-3

John 11:4

John 9: 1-3

Amos 3:6

Lamentations 3:38

1 Corinthians 10:31

Isaiah 48:9-11

Jeremiah 17:5

Ezekiel 36:22-23

Ephesians 1:6

Isaiah 43:7

Exodus 9:16

Ezekiel 20:14

1 Samuel 8:4-6

Daniel 9:17

Romans 15:8-9

John 12:27-28

Psalms 17:6



PRAYER STARTERS

Here are some starter topics to help you direct your prayers...

Element – eFamilies: pray for the eFamilies ministry and growth/encouragement of those involved.

Personal Growth – Prayer: pray that your own prayer life would grow in honesty, perseverance, and consistency.

World – Pray about supply chain disruptions and the insecurity many face in terms of materials, food, and energy.

Gospel Advancement – Pray for family members who have not experienced God's rescue and reconciliation.



WEEKLY EXERCISE

This week, evaluate and journal about the times you pray:

- When and why do you pray?
- What are you thinking about? What are you thinking about God and/or yourself?
- Are you complaining or confessing?
- Are you appealing or praising?
- How important are your needs/desires in those moments? Or God's Glory?
- As you reflect on your day, what missed opportunities of prayer were there? Why?

Don't forget to check in on Element's Prayer Group in Church Center to read other's prayer requests throughout the week and to post your own prayer request.



This week's content reveals the many ways we can misunderstand prayer, and how those misunderstandings can keep us from experiencing the fullness of what prayer with God can be. It may be helpful to review the five examples, noted on page 16, of how "prayer" can actually be misguided. Are there times people in your group have prayed for those reasons?

It's important to remember that the grace of God allows us to see and learn from our misunderstandings without being crushed by them or put to shame. Strive to create a safe environment in which people can name the ways in which their understanding of prayer has been lacking, and encourage them in how their prayers can mature as they move forward. As you see one another's understanding and practice of prayer grow, point that out and celebrate it together!

- Are there any ways you've been "praying" that you now realize have not been true prayer?
- Why is it important that God has initiated the conversation with us?
- Have you ever obtained what you desired? Did it fulfill and bring the "salvation" you were looking for?
- Do you truly believe that God wants you to talk with Him? If not, explain.
- How can prayer help us find contentment in God alone?
- While God allows the freedom for complaints and appeals (look at the Psalms!), what would it look like to move toward confession and praise—individually and as a community?

Prayer Time: As an exercise in confession and praise, talk about what has taken the role of a functional savior in your life (either currently or in the past). Spend some time in confession, talking about how placing our trust in anything other than God is sinful and harmful. Spend some time in praise, worshipping God for His faithfulness and true ability to save and fulfill.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



John 12:27-28 Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? `Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

How do you expect/want God to answer your prayers?



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

How have you seen God answer your prayers?



Hebrews 1:1-3 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

How is the Gospel the ultimate answers to all our prayers?

WEEK TWO
WHAT PRAYER IS NOT



John 9:1-3 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

How many of your prayers are either complaints or appeals for something? *If unsure, ask others around you for a better sense.*



Psalms 143:1-2 Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

What have you looked to in life to be a functional savior?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDS PRAYER GUIDE

TWO: WHAT PRAYER IS NOT



Sometimes we treat prayer like Instacart. Here is my order; I want it fast and exactly how it was ordered, or I'll take my business elsewhere. Instead, prayer should start with recognizing how awestruck we are by Jesus and His love for us. This will naturally draw us to how unworthy we are, and how blessed we are that we can come to God with our petitions.



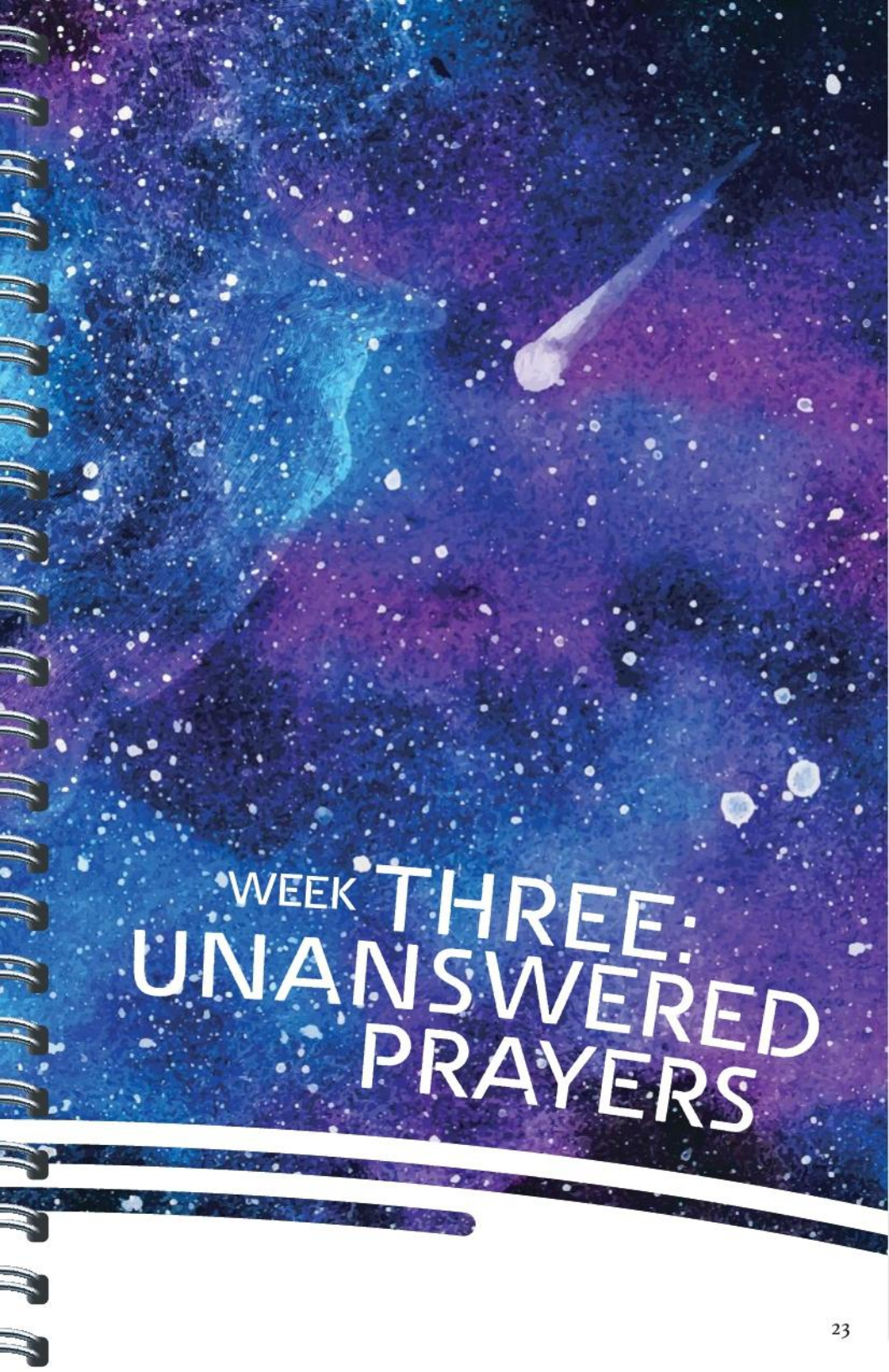
ASK THIS: Why do you think we should pray? Does God need us to give Him compliments to make Himself feel better about who He is? Hopefully, your child will come to the realization, with your help, that God doesn't need us to make Himself feel good. Explain to your kids that when we talk to God and praise Him, it's because we love Him and want to express that love in our prayer. Explain that we love Jesus for who He is, not for what He can give us. But by the same token, we are blessed because Jesus delights in giving us gifts.



DO THIS: During the time you chose last week as your new rhythm for prayer, grab your kid's prayer journal (NOTE: prayer journals were made in Sunday school this week. If you were not able to attend service, extras will also be located in the activity take home box, which can be picked up at Element.) As a family, go through the prayer sheet, filling in all the sections. Smaller kids can draw a picture of what they would like to pray about, or parents can help fill in the blanks. After you have all filled in the journal, pray together, specifically mentioning the areas you completed in the journal. Parents, you can fill in your prayer journal in the same way, modeling this habit for your children.



PRAY THIS: Father, you are truly a loving and giving God. Forgive us when we treat you like a genie in a bottle, who grants wishes. Thank you that we are able to come to you with needs and that we can trust you will always do what's best for us. Let us treat you like the Holy God you are.



WEEK THREE:
UNANSWERED
PRAYERS

SERMON RECAP

There are a lot of people who do not pray because they think it does not change anything. Dallas Willard once wrote, *"The idea that everything would happen exactly as it does regardless of whether we pray or not is a specter that haunts the minds of many who sincerely profess belief in God. It makes prayer psychologically impossible, replacing it with dead ritual at best."* When someone prays about something and God answers in a way that they see as restorative and affirmative, we tell everyone about it, but what about when our prayers go unanswered? Are there reasons for unanswered prayers?

- **Sometimes we pray and our request is off, so God just says "no."**
The Bible is full of stories about people who ask for something and don't get it.

The Bible has as many stories about unanswered prayer as it does about answered prayer. Ultimately, we don't want a God who would give in to our dysfunctions or our egos. For instance, we pray that God would change someone else for selfish reasons, so that we don't have to grow up and deal with an issue that irritates us. God's "no" in this case is actually for our own benefit.

- **God will sometimes say "no" to our requests in order to grow us.**
Relational brokenness is one of the primary blockers to an honest prayer life with God Himself.

There are times we don't go to God in humbleness, but with an attitude that everyone else is the problem and we are not the problem. When we cling to unforgiveness, it not only reveals a lack of understanding of God's grace, but also leads to all kinds of wrong prayers.

- **God will say "no" when the timing isn't right.** Unanswered prayer could mean that the request is not necessarily wrong, but that the timing is wrong.

God stands sovereign over time and has the ability to say no. He does this when He knows when something should best come about; it's about His timetable and not ours.

WEEK THREE: UNANSWERED PRAYERS

- **Sometimes God says "no" and we don't know why.** There are times when people pray for "good" things with "good" hearts, and that prayer does not seem to get answered.

We will not know why on this side of eternity. Nobody has all the answers except God Himself. Our perspective is often so limited, but God sees and knows everything. That is why we continue to trust Him even when we hear a "no."

PRAYER IS:

A continuing conversation that God has started through His Word and provided by His grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with Him.

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SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Isaiah 59:1

Matthew 17:4

Matthew 20:21

Luke 9:54

Mark 11:25

Isaiah 59:1-2

2 Corinthians 12:9

Galatians 4:4-5

2 Peter 3:8-9

Isaiah 40:31

Luke 22:42



PRAYER STARTERS

Here are some starter topics to help you direct your prayers...

Element – Youth, Jr. High School & Sr. High School: pray that Element would effectively reach and equip the next generation.

Personal Growth – Pray for self-control and discipline that would be led and cultivated by the Spirit, and not by your own flesh.

World – Poverty: pray about joblessness, hunger, and overcoming barriers that challenge people's ability to survive and thrive.

Gospel Advancement – Pray for your own neighborhood and the people living in it – that they would come to experience God's rescue and reconciliation.



WEEKLY EXERCISE

Think back to your prayer requests over the years and write down why the "no's" might have been "no's," or "not yet," and what you have seen God do in the midst of that.

Spend time walking with your family and/or friends, praying for one another and the neighborhood.



Unanswered prayers can be challenging for us on an individual level. They can be especially challenging in a group/community setting, where different opinions/interpretations of why they've gone unanswered come to the forefront. This sermon challenges the misconceptions we often have and shows us how we can offer Gospel encouragement to one another in the midst of our waiting—when we've yet to see/hear an answer from God or when He doesn't respond in the way we would like.

- What was the most difficult “no” you received from God? How did that affect you?
- How can we remind one another of God's goodness when He doesn't answer how we'd like?
- How can the way we handle God's “no's” inspire others to trust in Him?
- Are you still willing to voice your requests to God, knowing He may not grant them?
- What are the unrepentant things that are causing a barrier with God in your prayer life?
- What do unanswered prayers show us about God?
- How does Christ's desperate prayer in Luke 22:42 bring hope to us? How does the Gospel shape your prayer life?

Prayer Time: Spend time sharing with one another the requests/desires on your heart. How would you react if those requests were not answered in the way that you'd like? What does that reveal about your heart? Encourage the rest of the group to respond with encouragement about who God is and how that is good news in any circumstance.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

What are the reasons for times you shy away from praying?



Isaiah 40:31 they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength...

How do you handle unanswered prayers?



2 Peter 3:8-9 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

How have you experienced what you thought were unanswered prayers, but in reality, it was either a timing issue or simply a different outcome than you expected?

WEEK THREE: UNANSWERED PRAYERS



Isaiah 59:1 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear

How do you respond to someone who says that "prayer doesn't work?"



Luke 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Think through and draw out what might happen if God said "yes" to all of your prayer requests?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDSPRAYERGUIDE

THREE: UNANSWERED PRAYERS



Have you ever prayed for something that you didn't receive? It's safe to assume that all of us have experienced something like this. People can get really upset and assume that because whatever it is that they asked for is not immediately in their hands, or the situation hasn't instantly changed, that God is a mean God who doesn't listen to them. Because we know that God is faithful and keeps His promises, according to the Scriptures, we know that He does indeed hear us. He always listens to His children, but sometimes the answer to our request is no...or wait. Sometimes we fall into the trap where we are praying in a way that is all about us, and not about HIM. As frustrating as it can be, we may have to just trust and realize we may never know why the answer from God was no.



ASK THIS: What if we, as parents, always said yes to your request? When could that be a bad thing? Why is it important to sometimes say no to things? If parents have to deny a request, does it mean that they don't love their kids, or that they aren't listening?



DO THIS: Go to the back section of your journals. Label a few pages, "PRAYER YES ANSWERS." Your kids can decorate the pages with stickers and markers if they desire. Now, when the kids notice an answer to something they prayed about, they can add it to this section. Talk about how good parents, like God, sometimes have to say no for the good of their kids. Take a few minutes to share a story that you have about a time you prayed and the answer was NO, or NOT YET.



PRAY THIS: God, sometimes we ask for things that aren't good for us. Sometimes we make praying a little more about us than about YOU. We can be impatient and want answers NOW! Open our eyes to the prayers that are answered YES. Help us to rest in the fact that you are a good God, and want what's best for all of us.



WEEK **FOUR:**
REAL PRAYER

SERMON RECAP

Some people pray and are constantly wondering if God hears them. If and when we do pray, we usually expect God to interact with us in a way that we find acceptable. When He doesn't, we may think there is something wrong with the relationship or with God Himself. We are told that God is like a Father, which is wonderful, but some people view that relationship as one where God must always give us the answers we are seeking. Prayer, for some people, simply becomes a way to avoid the anxiety and responsibility of making a choice. As a Father, God knows that there are many times we will grow more when we have to think about what truly glorifies Him, asking others for wise counsel, and choosing to take responsibility. As a good parent, God is wise and will make sure that His children learn to choose the correct course, because there is no other way to grow character.

Jesus says that a real relationship with God is one that has a passion to know Him and be with Him. When Jesus speaks about going "into your room" to pray, it refers to place where we can be alone with God; this could be your backyard, a comfortable chair, your car...it is a space free of distractions. It is true that every moment of every day is meant to be lived with God, but it is also true that it is good to have moments away from all other distractions.

Jesus says that we can boldly call God "Father"; that's real prayer. Kids are typically not shy with their parents; they act like their parents are always there for them. They can interrupt them and it isn't disrespectful.

- **Religious prayer** is outward demonstration that may not have ever touched your heart. This is because the Gospel has not transformed you to be alive and have a passionate relationship with God Himself.
- **Non-religious prayer** is usually done in a way to try and coerce God or "the universe" to pay attention to you or to care about you.

Jesus says, "Religious prayer and non-religious prayer are both wrong and not true prayer." Jesus teaches us to build our prayers based upon our relationship with God. He starts with speaking to God as a Father.



By **PRAYER** becoming ‘a continuing conversation that God has started through His word and provided by His grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with Him,’ our prayer moves from ritual to relationship.

- **Religious prayer** is outward because the Gospel has not transformed people’s hearts to be alive.
- **Pagan prayer** is done in a way to try to coerce God to pay attention to you or to care about you.
- **Real Prayer** is prayer that is based on grace and God’s favor towards His children.

We must know the Gospel in order to know how to pray. Gospel prayer, real prayer, flows from the assurance that we have God’s approval in Christ.



SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Matthew 6:33

Matthew 6:5-8



PRAYER STARTERS

Here are some starter topics to help you direct your prayers...

Element – Pray for Element’s staff, elders, and board of directors—for encouragement, growth, health, and unity.

Personal Growth – Mission: pray for greater personal excitement, strategy, and purpose about how you are invited to participate in God’s mission to reach the lost.

World – Mental Health: pray for those afflicted by mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, the effects of trauma, suicidality, psychosis, and more—that they would receive the care needed and know they are loved and seen.

Gospel Advancement – Workplace: pray for your colleagues, subordinates, supervisor, etc.—that the workplace would function efficiently and harmoniously, and that those in the workplace would experience God’s rescue and reconciliation.



WEEKLY EXERCISE

This week, read through some Scripture and pray through them. After praying through those Scriptures, journal themes from the readings and point out who God is (His character and His methods).



This week explores the intimate, relational core of prayer—direct communication with our Father and Savior. While we often experience prayer corporately (in church services, in Gospel Community gatherings, etc.), and that is a good thing, we never truly know what one another’s prayer life is like in secret. Ideally, we can be honest about the health of our prayer life with each other.

- How do you feel about being alone with God? What is your prayer life like in secret?
- What’s the difference between a relational view of prayer and a transactional view of prayer? Which better depicts how you view prayer?
- Do you often find you don’t know what to say to God?
- What does the lack of a prayer life say about our inward state?
- Do you often pray in ways that bring a sense of nostalgia or familiarity?
- Do you have passion to be with and communicate with God, when no one else is around?
- How does an inward transformation lead to a vital prayer life?
- Do you struggle with the religious prayer or the non-religious prayer? Repent now from your tendencies – ask others to speak gospel truths of assurance into your life.
- Can you put more of your faith and trust into who Jesus says He is and what He has done for you to restore the broken relationship, so that you can return to the Father?

Prayer Time: With this week’s emphasis on real, intimate prayer, you may want to take some time as part of your gathering to have those in your group split off, find a private place, and spend some designated time in prayer with God. Invite everyone back to talk about what that kind of solitary prayer is like. Some may be more comfortable with it than others....that’s okay! Talk about how you can grow together.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



Matthew 6:7-8 *And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

In what ways have you treated prayer like begging God for scraps and not like real relationship?



Matthew 6:33 *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

What do you desire most from the Creator of all the Universe in what/how He communicates with you?



Matthew 6:5-6 *"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

What "prayer closets" do you have in your life where you become free from distractions? (Could be a backyard, favorite chair, hiking, etc.)

WEEK FOUR: REAL PRAYER



1 Timothy 2:1-2 *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*

Why is it important that God allows us to make choices?
What kind of choices are anxiety-provoking for you?



Matthew 6:9 *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

How would you assess your prayer life when it is just you and God? How would you like to see it grow/change?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDSPRAYERGUIDE

FOUR: REAL PRAYER



Parents let's have some real talk. When my (Christie's) kids were little, I would sometimes use prayer time with my kids in the wrong way. Maybe the kids were fighting right before we gathered for bedtime prayer, for instance. Instead of talking from my heart to Jesus during that time, I might pray that Jesus would help the kids to realize how lucky they were to have each other. That wasn't a REAL prayer...just a disguised lecture to my kids.

When we pray to God, we should be praying REAL prayers to a REAL God who wants to be in REAL relationship with us. Kids need to learn this from you, parents!



ASK THIS: Why do you think God wants our REAL thoughts and feelings? Is it possible to grow a healthy relationship with Jesus if we never have REAL conversations with HIM?



DO THIS: You are going to lead your child in one-sentence prayers by using M&Ms (found in your take-home box). Take the bag of candy and dump it in front of you. Everyone in the family, starting with parents, picks a candy and prays a one-sentence prayer using the guide in the PRAY section below. Keep an ear out for prayers that seem rote, or that involve little thought. If you hear something that makes you think your child isn't engaging, ask them, "Is that what you would want to say to Jesus if He were here in this room?" Take their answer seriously. The point isn't to critique, but to make aware.



PRAY THIS:

RED: Pray that someone you know, who doesn't follow Jesus, would come to know Jesus.

ORANGE: Pray for our church.

GREEN: Pray for our mayor, governor & president.

BLUE: Pray for our church family in other countries.

BROWN: Pray for someone in your family.

YELLOW: Pray for neighbors or friends.



WEEK FIVE:
THE LORD'S PRAYER

SERMON RECAP

It is interesting that Jesus' disciples never asked Him to teach them how to prophesy or preach, but they did ask Him to teach them how to pray. Most often, Jesus taught others how to pray by simply praying. He would pray where the disciples could see and hear Him, but He also went off to pray by Himself (sometimes at the most inconvenient times) and the disciples had to take care of themselves. That alone time was important for Jesus in how He modeled a life with God in front of the disciples.

When Jesus teaches how to pray He shows that prayer is:

- **Corporate. There is no I, Me or My anywhere.**

This is not a restriction to **only** pray like this in public, but in Luke 11 we see it is a response to the request to "teach us to pray." Though it is specifically a corporate prayer, it has carryover meaning and instruction for us as individuals, for our personal prayer.

- **Corrective.** It is not **for** their kingdom, their will, their desire; **it puts the interests of the church and God ahead of their own interests.**
- **Concise. The prayer is short and sweet. It gets to the point and leaves it in God's hands.**

Some people think that the TIME they spend in prayer is what counts, but what truly matters is the mental attitude and attitude of the heart. Say what you need to say; God will not be left to wonder about the rest. Wordiness is not a high priority.

How NOT to Pray

- **Don't Do It for Show** – He's not saying don't pray in public; He is saying that we don't need to show off. If you pray to show off, some people might think you're spiritual...but God is impressed at all.
- **Don't use Empty Repeats** – This isn't a caution about ever repeating a prayer, it's a caution about empty words or about repeating phrases just for filler or for effect.

How to Pray... what does the "Lord's Prayer" say to us today? Above all, this prayer should challenge us, when we pray, to stay God-focused.

WEEK FIVE: THE LORD'S PRAYER

We focus on God by focusing on...

1. **His Position as Father and Ruling Lord**
2. **His Will**
3. **His Purposes and Mission**
4. **His Daily Forgiveness**
5. **His Daily Provision**
6. **His Constant Protection**

Take a moment to reflect and declare Who it is we are talking to... our Father. Nothing is too trivial for God. We pray not because God is forgetful and needs to be reminded, but because praying deepens our relationship with Him.

MATTHEW 6:9-13

Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.”

”

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Matthew 6:5-15

Psalm 111:9

Luke 11

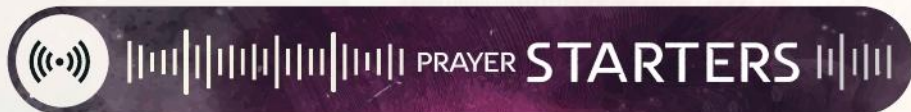
Philippians 4:6

Colossians 2:13

Colossians 3:13

Psalm 66:18

Psalm 52:14-15



PRAYER STARTERS

Here are some starter topics to help you direct your prayers...

Element – Volunteers/Servants: pray for current and future ministry support for all aspects of Element life—for encouragement, vitality, growth, and commitment.

Personal Growth – Pray for redemptive community expressed through shared life that is transparent, life-giving, and Gospel-focused.

World – Resource Stewardship: pray for better stewardship of our planet and its resources—pollution, harmful climate patterns (floods, droughts, etc.).

Gospel Advancement – Pray for engagement with culture that reflects the hope, truth, unity, love, and peace found in Jesus.



WEEKLY EXERCISE

Pray about who you can invite to Element's Pumpkin Killing on Sunday, October 30th! Ask God to give you the boldness and words to invite them, and that He would use this opportunity to draw them closer to Himself.

Similar to above, pray about how you can use Halloween as an opportunity to connect with neighbors, friends, and unbelievers through missional living.



While we have emphasized so far the freedom in prayer, it is interesting that Jesus taught His disciples to pray in such a specific way. While this doesn't mean we must only pray in those exact words every time, the Lord's Prayer offers us God-centered principles and healthy points of conversation with God.

While it's important to remind your group that Jesus is not advocating for a legalistic approach to prayer, there is great wisdom and value in what He shows. Without such a helpful reminder of what it means to pray, our prayers may tend to become self-focused, wordy, or irreverent. His emphasis on addressing God's provision and protection, for instance, reminds us of our constant need for sustenance and rescue from sin.

Through your conversation, try to help connect the dots for your group—how can Jesus' prayer be translated to real, authentic words of theirs that address the same themes?

- Which topics/themes of the Lord's Prayer are you most prone to praying? Why?
- Which are you least prone to praying? Why?
- Why do you think Jesus took the time to specifically instruct His followers to pray?
- What's the difference between judicial forgiveness and parental forgiveness? Which resonates with you more?
- Are you currently dealing with experiential separation from God? How so?

Prayer Time: Invite your group into a time of prayer patterned off the Lord's Prayer. For instance, introduce each topic/theme (see the 6 noted on page 41) before allowing the group to respond accordingly. After explaining the prayer exercise, you may want to start by saying something like, "Okay, let's start by addressing God's position as ruler and creator." The leaders can then model how to respond (e.g., "God, You are holy and mighty"). Once you have allowed time for others to engage in prayer, then introduce the next theme/topic... repeat until closing.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



Luke 11:1 *Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*

Why do you think the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray?



Matthew 6:7-8 *"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."*

In what ways have you prayed for wrong reasons including for show or by using empty phrases/repeats?



Matthew 6:11 *Give us this day our daily bread,*

Why is asking for daily bread a reminder that we are dependent on Him for everything, and that He is the source of everything that sustains us? Why do we forget?

WEEK FIVE:
THE LORD'S PRAYER



Matthew 6:13 *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

In what ways have you asked God to deliver you from evil?



Matthew 6:9 *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven...*

What does it mean for you that you can begin your prayers with, "Our Father?"



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDSPRAYERGUIDE

FIVE: THE LORD'S PRAYER



Wouldn't it be boring if we always had the same conversation with each other? Is that how relationships grow? There are so many fun ways to teach your kids how to pray. What better way to teach your kids how to pray, though, than to follow the example of Jesus Himself? This is called the Lord's Prayer.



ASK THIS: Why is it important to start with praise and confession when we are praying to God? How does that change the way the prayer feels from just jumping right in with our requests?



DO THIS: Make prayer bracelets as a family using the materials in your take-home box. Each person gets a pipe cleaner and pony beads in the colors blue, white, black, brown, red and purple. As each bead is placed on the pipe cleaner, explain to your kids what the bead represents and why.

Blue: This reminds us to start our prayer to a God who loves us. Instead of using the words, Our Father or Dear God (which are fine!), encourage your kids to think of other ways to address God. What about Daddy or Abba?

White: This bead reminds us to tell Jesus all the things we praise Him for, like His love, His mercy, and His grace.

Black: We are black with sin before we are forgiven. The black bead reminds us to tell Jesus the things that we have missed the mark on, or bad choices we have made.

Brown: Brown is one of the colors we see with bread. Take a moment when you see this bead to thank Jesus for our daily food and shelter.

Red: Red reminds us that Jesus shed His blood so we could be forgiven. When you look at this bead, are there any people who come to mind who might need some of your forgiveness?

Purple: Purple is the color of royalty. When we look at this bead, remember that God is a King who is sovereign over everything. Thank Him for your many blessings.



PRAY THIS: Using the beads as your guides, pray together as a family.



WEEK **SIX:**
ELEMENTS OF PRAYER: **A.C.T.S.**

SERMON RECAP

People everywhere have at least some difficulty knowing how to pray. We tend to default to the way we have heard others pray. Because we've heard people being "eloquent" as they pray, we think God wants us to step up our vocabulary to a higher level, so we try to learn the new spiritual dialect, but God wants to have a relationship with us as we are.

Today and this week we are going to take a look at a METHOD of prayer that became popular several years ago, called the ACTS Method. It is meant to help us guide our prayer time and bring some balance to it at the same time.

- **A – Adoration – “Adoration” is another way of saying Worship.**

The word “adore” comes from a Latin word which means to worship. Worship is **declaring** or **displaying** the “worth” of God, through your words or actions. We worship God for who He **is** and what He **does**. We declare praiseworthy things about Him that come to mind. Look at Psalm 103... it can feel a little awkward at first, but the more you do it, the more natural it will feel.

- **C – Confession – The word “confess” means to speak the same thing, to agree, or to admit.**

When we confess before our Father, it is not the time to pass blame, or even try to share it. When you confess sin, it is also not the time to **minimize**, or **rebrand** it, or **play it down**. The right way to confess is to admit, agree, and speak the same thing God would over it. Confession is not just being sorry for what we have done. When we confess, we speak about it in the same way God would speak about it, and we admit that we have committed it, regardless of the outside circumstances.

Elements of confession:

Isolating and identifying sin (what I do).
Calling it what it is.
Making no excuses.
Making no promises.
Claiming Mercy and Grace because of Jesus.

- **T – Thanksgiving – Thanking God for who He is. Thanksgiving is an admission that we need Him, and that we are better with Him than we are without Him.**

WEEK SIX: ELEMENTS OF PRAYER: A.C.T.S.

There is a right and a wrong way to give thanks. Thanking God is not meant to be a brag session about ourselves (like the pharisee in Luke 18). Our thanks should focus on God's grace and goodness, and the way He provides for us and strengthens us.

Four things here to be thankful for: 1. He is good. 2. His love is steadfast. 3. His love endures forever...never runs out. 4. He's always faithful...to all generations.

- **S – Supplication – A supplication is a request or a petition. It is asking for things, like help, healing, blessing, mercy, and strength.**

The Apostle Paul encouraged us to make "supplication for all the saints," which means to pray diligently for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We don't ask because we think we deserve it; we ask because God is good and faithful. We also pray like Jesus when making supplication: "Nevertheless, not my will, but YOURS be done."

ACTS is not a formula for prayer, it is a METHOD to help us learn to pray. We are not trying to soften God up to be more receptive to us or our requests; we want to live in a real relationship with Him. ACTS is not a formula for power in prayer, because prayer itself is not powerful... God is.

“PRAYER and praise are the oars by which a man may row his boat into the deep waters of the knowledge of Christ.” - Charles Spurgeon

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Philippians 4:4-6

Psalms 51:11

Psalms 100:4-5

Galatians 4:6

John 14

Psalms 4:1

Romans 8:15

1 John 1:9

Psalms 5:8

Psalms 103:1-5

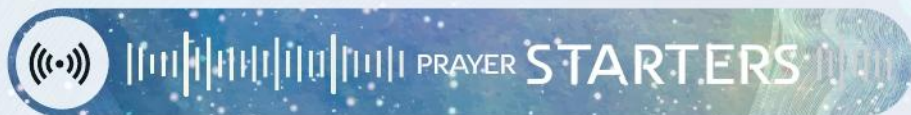
Luke 18:11

James 1:5

Romans 10:9

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Ephesians 6:18



PRAYER STARTERS

Here are some starter topics to help you direct your prayers...

Element – Sunday Services: pray that services would flow and engage people in a way that helps them experience Jesus more powerfully.

Personal Growth – Discipleship: pray that you would surrender more of life to the empowering presence and lordship of Jesus.

World – Crime: pray for the violence, mass shootings, and other crimes that occur every day; pray for restoration in our criminal justice system to enact justice and help rehabilitate.

Gospel Advancement – Delta High School: pray for the staff, faculty, and student body, as well as Element's opportunities to engage and display the love of God.



WEEKLY EXERCISE

Each day, journal the people you think about or interact with, the businesses you visit, the projects you want to work on, the chores that have to be done, the things you desire to possess, and/or the activities you wish to do or watch. Pray for all these things in the moment, and as you reflect back on your journaling.



Steve offers another method of prayer this week that includes Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Again, you will want to highlight the nuance of methods like this with your group—they are not meant to become formulaic or rote, but offer suggestions for how to approach prayer when we may feel stuck or unmotivated.

- When do you find it difficult to know what/how to pray?
- What methods, practices, or other written prayers have you used to help you grow in prayer?
- What is the ACTS prayer? Have you had any experience with this method?
- In what ways can you grow in adoration, confession, thanksgiving and or supplication?
- What small, short, simple steps can we take as a community for those who are not ready yet to pray out loud?

Prayer Time: Like last week, guide your GC through a led prayer patterned off this model. Remind your group of some of the takeaways from the message prior to diving in, such as not having to elevate language, keeping it concise, and not sugarcoating confessions. After introducing the exercise, walk your group through each part of the ACTS method, modeling each one.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



Psalm 103:2-5 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

How do you (or have you) adored God?



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

In what ways have you properly and improperly confessed sin before God?



Psalm 100:4-5 Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise! Give thanks to Him; bless His name! For the Lord is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations.

Do you offer prayers of thanksgiving before God? What are they like?

WEEK SIX:
ELEMENTS OF PRAYER: A.C.T.S.



Psalm 103:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

How often do you focus on God's grace and goodness in prayer?



Galatians 4:6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

How do you present your supplication before God? How much time do you spend in supplication verses the other three aspects of the ACTS method?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDS PRAYER GUIDE

SIX: A.C.T.S.



Sometimes prayer seems so simple, and yet speaking to an all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful God can render us speechless. If you feel that way as an adult, think about how your kids feel! That's when a prayer pattern can come in handy. Prayer patterns are also an easy way to teach your kids about prayer in a practical way.



The ACTS prayer pattern can be a simple way to get your kids away from rote prayers. For that matter, you might even want to use it to start thinking more deeply about how and what you say to God.



ASK THIS: Why would it be important to really think about what you are saying to God, instead of having one memorized prayer that you always pray? How does starting a prayer with telling God how amazing He is help us to remember who we are?

DO THIS: As a family, get three jars/pencil holders/cans and some craft sticks (found in your box). Brainstorm together things about God you adore, things you may have to say sorry for, things to be thankful for, and things/people to pray for. Write or draw your ideas on different craft sticks and then decorate the containers. When you pray and your child gets stuck, have them pick a stick out of the appropriate container to get their prayer going again.



PRAY THIS: ACTS stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Since these are words that kids might not understand, give a simple explanation like below. This week, pray with your kids like this:

- | | | |
|---------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Adoration | → | Wow, God, you are really...! |
| Confession | → | God, I'm sorry for doing... |
| Thanksgiving | → | Thank you, God, for... |
| Supplication | → | Please help... |

The image shows the cover of a spiral-bound notebook. The cover has a dark teal and purple abstract background with a faint map of the United States. The text is white and reads "WEEK SEVEN: UNCEASING PRAYER".

WEEK SEVEN:
UNCEASING PRAYER

SERMON RECAP

One of the dangers in "spiritual life" is thinking that we know what the Scriptures are saying when we don't; we at times get so used to Bible language that we fail to stop and think, "What did the writer mean by that?" This is why an understanding of prayer is so important, because prayer is always connected to a very deep truth: God is always present, which means He is right wherever and whenever we are.

Jesus models this for us by reminding us that God is like a Father. Prayer is about relationship and not trying to "get things" or manipulate God. Christian prayer, the kind of prayer that Jesus models, sees God Himself as the goal. Prayer is mostly about the fact that we are WITH God in the very process of prayer. **Unceasing prayer** is more about how we do life *with* God as we live it out. Being with God does not mean doing things you don't ordinarily do; it means doing things you ordinarily do *in a different way*.


What should we pray about in unceasing prayer? Everything. What do you think about? That is what we talk to God about. Richard Foster says, "*We bring ourselves before God just as we are, warts and all. Like children before a loving Father, we open our hearts and make our requests. We do not try to sort out the good from the bad...we tell God, for example, how frustrated we are with the co-worker at the office or the neighbor down the street. We ask for food, favorable weather, and good health.*" These mundane things are part of our life, so it should become part of our life with God.

When should we pray? All the time, unceasingly. – If we are living life with Him, technically every moment—whether we are talking to Him or not—is unceasing relationship with Him. When Paul says, "We should pray without ceasing," it comes from the understanding that we are to pray or to abide in the presence of God and be aware of His presence with us continually. What does prayer look like? It looks like life. Prayer is not simply being on your knees and saying certain words; it looks like our life lived with God.


Where/when should you pray? Anywhere, anytime. There are no rules, but the core focus should be a desire for God Himself.

WEEK SEVEN: UNCEASING PRAYER

Hopefully, as we mature and grow in our faith, we will learn to pray without ceasing and discover that going throughout our days with an awareness of God's presence is how we were meant to live. Thomas Merton in *Complete Prayers* wrote, "We do not want to be beginners. But let us be convinced of the fact that we will never be anything else but beginners all our life."

- 
- **Real prayer sees God Himself as the goal, not what we are trying to get or achieve.**
 - **Simple Prayer is removing the gap between what we are thinking about and what we are praying about; speak to God about what you are thinking about.**
 - **True prayer will come from a place of honesty where we live daily life with God.**

We pray simple, true, and real prayers throughout our life. We are not trying to hop from one form to another, we want all of our life to be defined by this communion with God.



SCRIPTURE REFERENCES



1 Thessalonians 5:17

Genesis 28:11-15

Ephesians 6:18

Revelation 8:1 & 4

2 Kings 2

 PRAYER **STARTERS** 

Here are some starter topics to help you direct your prayers...

Element – Thailand Church plant: pray for the health and work of the church to reach people with the love of Jesus.

Personal Growth – Pray for the provision of resources to encourage your spiritual growth (books, audiobooks, podcasts, articles, etc.)

World – Human Trafficking: pray for an end to the way trafficking mars the image of God in human beings and perpetuates greed and depravity.

Gospel Advancement – Pray that the Gospel would be shown through kindness, mercy, forgiveness, and generosity in how we interact with those around us.

 WEEKLY **EXERCISE** 

This Friday evening, come spend the night with friends, family, and community at Element's night of prayer and worship, where we'll engage in music and other ways to respond together to who God is and what He's doing!



Unceasing prayer is really an ongoing awareness of God's presence—even in the most mundane moments of life. In a lot of ways, this mirrors how we understand Gospel Community. Our normal relationships/community are transformed by an increasing awareness of God's presence and the reality of the Gospel. In this way, we are doing ordinary things differently (counter-culturally), because the presence of God changes everything. This may be a great time to refresh your group on what Gospel Community is and explain the parallels above. How can your individual and collective lives reflect this re-orientation to who Jesus is?

- What's the most mundane thing you've ever prayed about? Why is it important to bring those kinds of things before God?
- For you, what gets in the way of unceasing prayer?
- How do you anticipate a growing awareness of God's presence changing your everyday life?
- If you were to stop praying about "good" things and instead pray about what you were truly interested in, what would that look like? What preoccupies your thoughts?
- What kinds of constraints or habits have you learned that get in the way of simple, honest prayers? What would it mean to let go of those?
- What would it look like for you to have a vibrant, beautiful, multifaceted, mature vision of prayer and communion with God that keeps growing? Do you wish to have a growing prayer life?
- In what ways have you made God the goal of your (prayer) life?

Prayer Time: This week's teaching may be a relief to some, but it also may be anxiety-provoking to those who have spent years praying in formal, "religious" ways. It can be both an encouragement and a challenge. Spend time talking among the group about how you are challenged and encouraged regarding your prayer life....then ask the group what it would be like to talk with God as casually, honestly, and openly as you just did in the group. Ask God to help you, as a group, let go of the things that get in the way of true communion.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



Revelation 8:1 and 4 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. V4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

Do you believe your prayers are heard and matter?



Ephesians 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Do you think God cares more about you being impressive with your prayers or fully present?



Philippians 4:12-13 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

When do you find it most difficult to pray (to be in God's presence) with/about ordinary things?

WEEK SEVEN:
UNCEASING PRAYER



Genesis 28:12-15 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac... Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go..."

How can you better remove the gap between what you think about and what you pray about?



1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing...

What things are on your mind, even right now, that you can stop and pray about?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDS PRAYER GUIDE

SEVEN: UNCEASING PRAYER



Have you ever had something happen to you then you immediately grabbed your phone and started texting a friend about the experience? What if our prayer lives could be just like that? Praying continually can be a hard concept to teach your kids, but really, it's just another habit that needs developing. Praying continually can become a precious habit very easily by attaching it to something else that you do every day.



ASK THIS: What are some things that you do every day? What is your favorite thing to do each day? Who do you like to talk to every day? Prayer can be as simple as having a conversation with God. You don't have to use special words or have a special space. We can talk to God anywhere.



DO THIS: Establish one person in your family that will make a list of things that your family does every day without fail, and ask the kids for help with the list. Some examples could include the following: Eat dinner, brush my teeth, wash my face, go to bed, etc. Choose three of those activities to act as a reminder to pray. It doesn't have to be a prayer where you stop everything and bow (although there are times for that), but it should be a simple conversation with Jesus to talk about your day. For the next week, check in with your kids to see how they are doing with the exercise, and to tell them how you are doing as well. Hopefully, in time, the exercise of continual prayer will become as natural as breathing.



PRAY THIS: At the end of the exercise above, ask Jesus to give you the desire to pray without ceasing. Ask Him to help your family cultivate a practice of prayer that is as natural as calling a friend.



WEEK EIGHT:
PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

SERMON RECAP

Praying in the Spirit can sound other-worldly and spooky, but that is what the Scriptures tell us to do. The Greek word for “pray in” means “by means of,” “with the help of,” “in the sphere of,” and “in connection to.” Praying in the Spirit does not refer simply to the words we are saying, but it refers to *how* we are praying. Praying in the Spirit is praying according to the Holy Spirit’s leading.

Praying in the Spirit is prayer that is foundational. When we become a Christian, when the Spirit Himself comes in, we are born again. We are not Christians without the Spirit of God. Without the Holy Spirit, prayer to God is only mechanical because you “have to” do it. Those who pray in the Spirit have an almost primal language because there is a hunger to be with God Himself.

Prayer in the Spirit is real (or realistic). Paul just doesn’t say pray, “Abba, Father,” he says, “we cry.” The word *cry* is a word of deep emotion and references a person in distress. The Apostle Paul uses the word to describe our life and creation itself as groaning, crying out, and suffering. There is nothing in the Bible that says Christians are going to have an easier life than anybody else, but there is a promise: ***the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.***

Prayer in the Spirit is positional. We are adopted children; that is our position. God is favorably disposed toward us because He calls Himself Father. Prayer in the Spirit helps us to see our position before the Father because of what Jesus did for us. Being a Christian means that we are not trying or hoping someday God will bless us with being His children; it means we *are* His children now by trusting in Christ. This leads to a language of intimacy we would never know otherwise.

Praying in the Spirit is experiential. The Spirit is *who* convinces our hearts of the truth of the Gospel! It is more than mere intellectual knowledge; truly being children of God needs to be experiential and real to our hearts. Many people today think of the words “praying in the Spirit” as an experience that makes us feel good, but praying in the Spirit is walking with the Spirit into deeper truths—in a foundational place of relationship with God Himself. Our focus is not us; it is Him.

WEEK EIGHT: PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

Prayer in the Spirit is communal. In Romans, Paul says, “**And by him we...**” Jesus, in the Lord’s Prayer, doesn’t say we pray, “My Father.” He says we pray, “Our Father.” While it is true that we need a private prayer life, we also need those around us so we can pray *our* Father. One of the best ways to deepen your prayer life privately is to also deepen your prayer life corporately.

Prayer in the Spirit is not a consumer tool; it's a refiner's fire.


“When our hearts are properly focused, prayer will become more natural and relationship with God will be deepened.”

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Ephesians 6:16-18
1 Corinthians 14:15

Jude 20-21
Romans 8:15-16,

19-22, 26-27 & 29
Matthew 14:30



PRAYER STARTERS

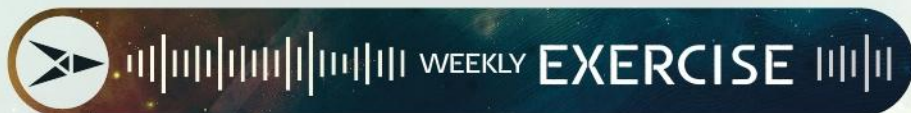
Here are some starter topics to help you direct your prayers...

Element – Pray for Element’s local support of non-profits, church planting, and world relief.

Personal Growth – Servanthood: pray that God would cultivate a servant’s heart within you, encouraging you to give of your time and talent for His Kingdom.

World – Political Sphere: pray for our elected officials across the political spectrum, and branches of government—that they would lead with integrity, wisdom, and competence.

Gospel Advancement – Pray for Antioch, the church plant in San Luis Obispo we are helping as they are in their first year of launching and taking the Gospel to a specific neighborhood.



WEEKLY EXERCISE

Spend some time in focused silence, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what to pray. When you feel led, pray accordingly.



This week's message seeks to demystify what it means to pray in the Spirit, which can seem so elusive to us at times. Praying in the Spirit, however, is a natural act for believers, as it is the Spirit who convicts us of our sin and God's righteousness in the first place! By better understanding the Spirit-led nature of prayer, we can seek to grow deeper in our communion with God and with other believers through prayer.

The emphasis on subjective experience in this week's message is a great topic to explore as a group. Oftentimes, we know the right answer (objectively), but struggle to *feel* as if it is true in our own life (subjectively). What is beautiful about community is that we can be used to help truth become more alive and subjectively real as it is borne out collectively. By entering in to each other's stories and experiences, we can encourage one another as children of God.

- What does it mean to pray from the position of God's child?
- When do you feel the least confident about God's disposition toward you?
- What's the difference between religious prayer and Gospel-centered prayer?
- How do you want to grow deeper in your understanding of what it means to be God's child?
- How are you feeling led to grow your corporate prayer life?

Prayer Time: Pray that the Spirit would help each of those in your community to see Jesus more clearly and to understand their position in relation to Him more deeply. The beauty and mystery of the Gospel is our lowliness compared to His mightiness, coupled with the intimacy of being His child. Pray for a confidence and honesty that would grow as you understand this paradox. Pray that your community would sharpen each other and remind one another of this position often.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



1 Cor 14:15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also...

Have you asked the Holy Spirit to guide/lead your prayers?



Rom 8:15-16 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Why does God use weakness to grow us?



Jude 20-21 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

What does it mean that praying in the Spirit is a refiner's tool?

WEEK EIGHT: PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT



Ephesians 6:18 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

In what ways can you experiment with prayer this week?



Rom 8:26-27 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. 27 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...

How do you groan in times of sin or trouble? Do you groan with the Spirit or on your own?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDS PRAYER GUIDE

EIGHT: PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT



"Praying in the Spirit" sounds like it is harder to do than it is. Praying in the Spirit is not just for super "religious" people; it is for everyone. The truth is that praying in the Spirit is praying "with the help of" or "by the leading of" the Holy Spirit.



ASK THIS: Name some things that are more powerful when used together. For example, the flavor of peanut butter is better with jelly than it is on its own. Certain recipes may taste fine on their own, but if you add salt, more flavors can come to life. While these are terrible analogies for the Holy Spirit's power, the idea is that as peanut butter is better with jelly, and recipes are better with some salt added, our prayers take on new flavor when guided by the Holy Spirit. With God's Spirit we can have an explosive, fruitful prayer life.



DO THIS: Gather baking soda, food coloring, vinegar, and a dropper from your take-home box. Mix food coloring into white vinegar to color it. Keep each color of vinegar in a separate cup and add a dropper to each cup. Cover the bottom of a baking tray with baking soda. Drip a drop of the colored vinegar on to the baking soda and watch it explode!

Talk about the power of the Spirit and how He can transform our lives when we pray for Him to work in our lives. Compare this to the power of the explosion that happens when the vinegar hits the soda.



PRAY THIS: Ask your children to choose a color of vinegar that represents either themselves or someone they would like to pray for. As they drop the vinegar onto the soda, pray that the Holy Spirit will come to that person and transform their lives.



WEEK NINE:
**ABRAHAM'S
PRAYER**

SERMON RECAP

This week we begin to make a transition from talking about what prayer is, to how certain people in the Bible prayed.

We have walked through unanswered prayers, real prayer, the "Lord's Prayer," ceaseless prayer, and what "praying in the Spirit" means. Now we want to see how some people in the Bible actually prayed and what their examples can show us. The Bible says real spirituality is not just believing in God or even talking to God; real spirituality is responding to a living God who speaks, has spoken, and acts in the world. God has come to reveal Himself in real ways. Real "spirituality" is knowing the God who comes and shows Himself to us through His word.

- **HOW ABRAHAM PRAYED.** One commentator says that Abraham's prayer is different than ours in that he will pray, talk to God, "*responsively, extremely, and missionally.*"

Prayer starts with God. It is a response to God first opening our hearts to seek Him. Abraham has a far deeper sense of his unworthiness before the majesty of God than we do, but he is much more confident that God wants to bless him than most religious people. He is not vague (God is whatever I wish Him to be) and he is not ritualistic (I do these things and God has to do that); he has real interaction.

Abraham knows God is just. No matter what God decides to do, Abraham still prays on behalf of those he certainly disagrees with.

- **Why does he pray like this?** How can we be those who pray with such a concentrated outward focus that comes from knowing God's goodness?

We don't pray because God lacks something (like knowledge of an event); we pray by having a deep theological understanding of the person of God. Genesis 18:25 ***Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*** That's a rhetorical question; Abraham knows the answer. God is a just God. No matter what else happens in our world and in our lives, one thing is sure: **God is a God of justice.** What hope is there for the world unless there's a God of justice who someday is going to put everything right? If there's no God of justice, there's no true hope for the world.

But...Abraham also knows that **God is a God of grace.** Abraham's life was a mess, he has let God down over and over, and he has failed to believe God

ABRAHAM'S PRAYER

in many circumstances, but God still establishes covenant relationship with him. Abraham knows God is a sparing God that forgives, pardons, and loves. He's a God of grace. Tim Keller writes, *"If there's no God of justice there's no hope for the world. But if there is a God of justice what hope is there for any of us?"*

Abraham, in Genesis 18, keeps saying to God, "I'm representing these people, but don't be mad at me." When Jesus comes, He represented us in righteousness and took the wrath of divine justice against injustice and unrighteousness on Himself. He paid the penalty for our sins. When we understand the Gospel, we can pray, *"Lord, would you save us, an undeserving people, for the sake of one who is righteous?"* God's answer is, *"Yes, if it's Jesus."* That is why we put our faith in Christ and not people.

- **How do we pray like Abraham?** We understand that God is holy and also loving, which means there is now a way that we (the undeserving) can be saved by God as He upholds His righteousness and justice.

We pray like Abraham when we understand the Gospel.

A **PRIEST** is someone who "mediates the divine," meaning they put who God is on display. We are called to be God's priests to the world so that when the world sees us they can catch a glimpse of what the God we serve is like.

- **There is an appendix on intercessory prayer on pages 118-119. We encourage you to look at it and then intercede and pray for those that God lays upon your heart.**

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Genesis 18:17, 20-21,
23-27 & 32-33

Luke 23:34

Hebrews 7:25



PRAYER STARTERS

For the rest of the series, we will no longer be giving you pointed prompts; rather, we will ask you where you feel led to pray. We encourage you to journal every day, and even share with others!

Element – *What are you feeling led to pray about for Element, as a church?*

Personal Growth – *How can you specifically pray about growing in Christ's likeness, reflecting the hope of the Gospel?*

World – *How can you pray for a world that is ruined by sin, yet being made new?*

Gospel Advancement – *How can you pray for the advancement of the Kingdom of God and the ministry of reconciliation made possible through Jesus?*



WEEKLY EXERCISE

This week is Thanksgiving. With this in mind, read through the appendix on intercessory prayer and pray every day on behalf of others - petitioning for their understanding of the Gospel this week.

As we shift toward looking at specific prayers in the Bible more closely, we start off by looking at the boldness and familiarity of Abraham's prayer about Sodom and Gomorrah. This prayer shows us so many things—reverence for God, familiarity, the power of intercession, and more. What's amazing is that it is because of Jesus' own intercession on our behalf that we can approach the Father freely and intercede for others.

We've talked about our position before God throughout this series. Practicing intercessory prayer is not only for the benefit of others, but it also serves as a reminder of our deep, spiritual need fulfilled by the work of Jesus. We intercede for others out of love, and because of the love first shown toward us in Jesus.

- Read Abraham's prayer. What stands out to you?
- In what ways do your prayers resemble Abraham's prayer? In what ways do your prayers seem different?
- How does Abraham's prayer foreshadow the work of Jesus?
- How would you define spirituality?
- What does it mean to pray "responsively, extremely, and missionally?"
- What is intercession prayer? What does it look like to stand before God as a priest for others? Why should you pray for them?
- Who can you be in intercessory prayer for?
- What would it look like for you to pray with the familiarity and boldness that Abraham demonstrated? How might that affect you? Your family? Your neighborhood?

Prayer Time: Spend some time in intercessory prayer as a group. You may want to pray for people in your community, or for others in your life. As you pray on others' behalf, reflect also on how Jesus' intercession has restored your identity and clothed you in His righteousness.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Do you approach God with confidence?



Genesis 18:23-25 Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

How do you pray with deep theological understanding of God?



Hebrews 7:25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

What is the Gospel, and how does it specifically shape your prayers?

ABRAHAM'S PRAYER



Genesis 18:20-21 Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.

How do you pray in response to a God being a God of justice and grace?



1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

What does it mean to pray for others as a priest?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDSPRAYER GUIDE

NINE: ABRAHAM'S PRAYER



This week, we look at Abraham's prayer to God on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's prayer is beautiful, because we get to see how God responds to Abraham's request, as well as how Abraham responds to God. Abraham doesn't pray to a god he would like God to be, he prays to the God who is. Abraham understands that God is holy, loving, righteous, and just—and he doesn't expect God to be any other way.



ASK THIS: **What is God like? How do you know that? What has happened in your life that has shown you God's nature?** It's important that you guide your kids to understand that God is who God is. We may try to make Him into our image in order to make us feel a certain way, but the truth is so much better—God is God and He is loving and righteous.



DO THIS: *Get a stamp pad, piece of paper, magnifying glass, and wipes from your box. Have your kids make prints of their fingerprints. Use a magnifying glass to look at them closely. Ask them: **Did you know that each person is born with fingerprints that are totally different? In fact, investigators use fingerprints to find out who committed crimes. We can't make them how we want them to look; they just are what they are. God is, in a different way, just like our fingerprints. He is what He is; we can't change Him and we shouldn't want to. He is holy, or different from everyone here on earth. He is loving and He always does what is right. What are some places that you see God's fingerprints in your life? What are some places you see God's fingerprints in the stories from the Bible?** Listen to your kids' answers, trying to guide them to examples of God's love and holiness.*



PRAY THIS: Read Genesis 18 or paraphrase for younger kids. Encourage your kids to pray as Abraham prayed, in a responsive way, listening for God. Show them by going to God's word and then praying, you are letting God start the conversation so that they can respond to Him.

WEEK TEN:
HEMAN'S
PRAYER



SERMON RECAP

During the last few weeks of this series on prayer, we want to look at examples of how people prayed in the Scriptures so that we can have insight into what real prayer looks like. Today we look at a prayer by Heman that is dark; as a matter of fact, the last word in the Psalm is darkness. There is a reason we want to study a dark prayer like this. Growth, for us, happens most often in the darkest times when we are faced with the question: "Where are we looking for salvation?" When times are dark, we must pray in the midst of it and pray through it, this will allow our prayers to be honest and real.

Spiritual and personal darkness is real and can last a very long time.

There *are* times trusting in Jesus *more* can lead us out of dark places, but that is not always the case. We must be intellectually and emotionally honest when we deal with our own darkness as well as other people's darkness. There are two types of darkness:

- *Outside darkness* is the darkness of circumstance.
- *Inside darkness* is when the pressures that are outside are destroying inside as well.

We know that God will never abandon those who are His, but it doesn't mean that there aren't times we won't *feel* abandoned and deserted.

Darkness can show us God's grace. Times of darkness are some of the very best places and times to learn about God's grace; Heman *is* talking to God. His words are raw because he is not controlling his temper, his tongue, or his emotions. God doesn't smite Heman for his anger or questions. Derek Kinder says that prayers like this in the Bible are a witness to God's understanding, that He knows how we speak when we are desperate.

In our darkness, God can grow us into who we are meant to be. In darkness is when we serve and worship God, not for what we get from Him, but simply because of who He is. David Winter, who suffered a disease that over a period of three weeks robbed him of his sight, said, "*Never doubt in the darkness what God has shown you in the light.*"

HEMAN'S PRAYER

The darkness can be lessened in the Gospel. Heman felt like God had abandoned him, that he had no purpose, and that the darkness was absolute and permanent; but he was wrong. Heman most likely helped write some of the greatest psalms, not in spite of his darkness, but *because* of his darkness. That darkness turned him into an artist who has helped millions of people.

The Gospel teaches us that our darkness is not permanent or eternal. We know we can cry out to God in complete honesty knowing He hears us and knowing that through Jesus He has already done something about our darkness.

“**CHARLES
SPURGEON**

“You will observe that the desire to commune with God is intensified by the failure of all other sources of consolation...” When we come to a place where we think we are at the end of ourselves, that is the perfect place for God to begin moving in ways that center in His own glory.”

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Psalms 88:1-2, 6-7, 9-12,
15-16 & 18

Matthew 27:45-46



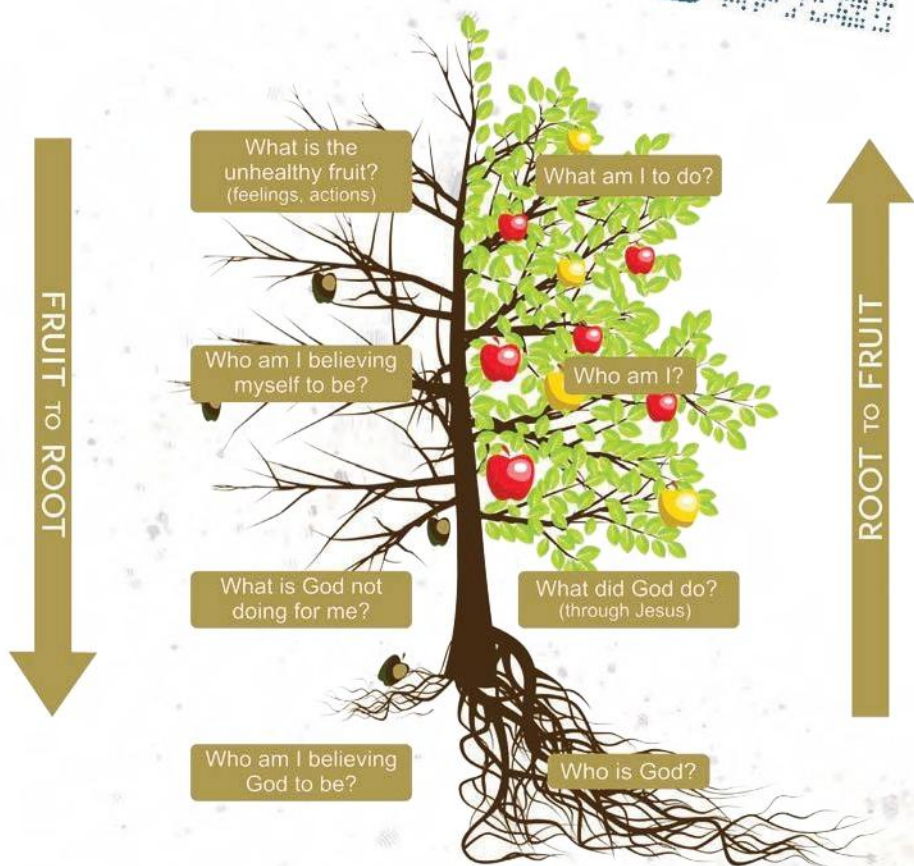
Watch the following video that explains the Fruit to Root exercise. The video can offer valuable insights into looking at what the fruit is and how we can experience it in our life.

Find video and resources at:

www.ourelement.org/prayer/fruit



BELIEVE



REPENT

Now that we're looking at specific examples of prayer in Scripture, we see concepts about prayer in action, in real life. Unfortunately, our real lives often include periods of darkness that may lack clear explanations. Psalm 88 shows us what it means to address this kind of darkness honestly before God. Western Christian culture has not always made it easy to be honest and vulnerable about the darkness we face, and we may be tempted to hide it or downplay its effects.

We are meant to be honest about our lives with one another—even seasons of darkness. This is an important point to emphasize in your community. Take care to set a space of freedom that allows people to come forward with any darkness they're struggling with. Psalm 88 shows us that as honest as we may be about the darkness itself, we can also acknowledge that God continues to be our Savior in the midst of those struggles. The realities of our own dark times are held steady in the hands of our God who listens to our cries.

Read Psalm 88 as a group before discussing some of the following questions.

- What kind of darkness are you currently experiencing?
- Are you comforted, knowing God is okay with prayers like these? How is the fact that Psalms 88 and 39 are in Scriptures evidence of God's grace?
- How can God identify with His people in struggle/pain? Do you believe that He *does* identify with you?
- How comfortable are you voicing your distress like the author of Psalm 88 voices distress?
- How did Jesus take on the ultimate darkness?
- How can we reflect the hope of the Gospel even during our darkest struggles?

Prayer Time: Lead a time of group prayer focused on bringing struggles before God honestly. Encourage your group not to downplay the bitterness or darkness of their struggles, but to trust that God can handle their prayers. If leaders have relevant struggles, model to the group what it looks like to cry out to God in the midst of such difficulty. After your time of prayer, commit to ongoing prayer for the struggles of the group and offering support to your members in need.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



Psalm 88:9 my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O Lord; I spread out my hands to you.

How have you experienced both outside and inside darkness?



Psalm 88:15-16 Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless. Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me.

Have you ever felt abandoned by God?



Psalm 88:6-7 You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

How have you seen God's grace through darkness?

HEMAN'S PRAYER



Psalm 88:1-2 O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry.

Do you feel the need to put on a happy face when communicating to God?



Matthew 27:45-46 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

How does the Gospel lessen the darkness?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDS PRAYER GUIDE

TEN: HEMAN'S PRAYER



Everything is NOT awesome. We know it, and our kids, if they don't know it now, will know it at some point. We all fall into some darkness in this world. We all fall into the pit of disappointment. The key is praying through those times, making prayer our first priority instead of the last-ditch effort.



ASK THIS: What are some things that make you sad? Mad? Scared? Who do you talk to during those times? Did you know that God is always with you, even when things are going wrong? What better person is there to talk to when you are mad, scared, or sad, than God?!



DO THIS: Grab some index cards, a Sharpie, and stickers from your box. Write the following verses on the cards: Joshua 1:9, 2 Timothy 1:7, Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 56:3-4, Philippians 4:6, John 14:27. If you have nonreaders, draw or find a picture to paste on the cards. Let your kids help you look up the verses. Tell them: **Sometimes we get scared, and the first thing we should do is pray...and then we should keep praying.** These cards are going to go right by your bed at night. If you are in your room or asleep at night, and you feel mad or sad or scared, pick up these cards and pray the verses on them (or tell them to "read" the pictures). You could even laminate the cards to make them last longer. Have your child choose the place where they will be kept.



PRAY THIS: Practice praying the verses a few times as a family. Assign each person a card and have them pray to Jesus just like they would pray if they were upset. Make sure they know it isn't a one-time thing. Sometimes our fear or anger can last more than a moment; sometimes it's for a period of time. We should never stop praying.



WEEK ELEVEN:
DANIEL'S PRAYER

SERMON RECAP

Many people think that prayer has to originate all from within ourselves. However, if we don't know who we are praying to, it is hard to start a conversation. That is why we have spent a lot of time in this prayer series trying to come to an understanding of who God is, so when we talk to Him, we enter into that conversation with hope and grace. Prayer isn't trying to manipulate God to get things; it is a relationship with a person (albeit, an all-powerful person full of majesty). God is not beholden to us and our prayers to do anything, but the means by which God releases much of His power on earth is the result of prayer.

Daniel is one of the most famous Bible heroes of all time. He prays to God and recognizes where his country failed, but also where God showed Himself as faithful. The book of Daniel, historically speaking, is written while the nation of Israel is in captivity in the nation of Babylon. Daniel was probably, scholars say, somewhere in his middle school years when he went to Babylon and yet you see a strong commitment to God in Daniel's life. How does Daniel pray?

Daniel's prayer life is characterized by **DISCIPLINE**. Daniel prayed routinely three focused times a day because his relationship with God was his primary source of strength.

The most important discipline we will ever have is meeting with God every day. If we don't take time for our relationship with God every day, we will start to be anemic in our relationships with others. A discipline becomes a way of life that relies on God's strength. Only by the Gospel being the focus will we desire to live (and essentially train) ourselves to center on God first.

Daniel was **committed to prayer even when it was seen as defiance**. Daniel prayed when it was against the law to pray...but he was also committed to pray in defiance of his current situation.

We don't know all the words that Daniel prayed each day, but it looks like it was recognition of his people's failures and also God's mercy. There is in his prayer:

- *A spirit of repentance and humility:* We don't hide our sin from God and also don't think we are "more" than we are in front of Him.
- *Great hope in God's mercy:* God doesn't hear our prayers or join in relationship with us because we are worthy; He listens because He is merciful.

WEEK ELEVEN:
DANIEL'S PRAYER

- Trust in the promises of God. God has proven Himself true to His word and we can trust that.

Daniel's prayer is **characterized by ENDURANCE**.

- *Daniel was willing to be thrown into the lion's den and never stopped praying.*
- *Daniel persisted in prayer until God answered.* Israel's return from exile did not happen for 70 years. Daniel prayed for 60 years before that answer was given.

Persistence is not a guarantee that God will do what we are praying for, but it is a reflection of the value we place in Him. The message of Daniel's story points beyond itself to someone much more humble, merciful, and with greater endurance than Himself, Jesus.



PRAYER

is the most
undervalued
"resource"
in the
church today.



SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Daniel 9:18

Daniel 1:1-2, 6-7, 20

Daniel 5:4

Daniel 6:4-7, 10-11

Daniel 9:8-11 & 17-19

Deuteronomy 30

2 Corinthians 12:9

Hebrews 12:1-2



PRAYER STARTERS

For the rest of the series, we will no longer be giving you pointed prompts; rather, we will be asking you where you feel led to pray. We encourage you to journal every day, and even share with others!

Element – *What are you feeling led to pray about for Element, as a church?*

Personal Growth – *How can you specifically pray about growing in Christ's likeness, reflecting the hope of the Gospel?*

World – *How can you pray for a world that is ruined by sin, yet being made new?*

Gospel Advancement – *How can you pray for the advancement of the Kingdom of God and the ministry of reconciliation made possible through Jesus?*



WEEKLY EXERCISE

This week, evaluate and journal about the times you pray:

- When and why do you pray?
- What are you thinking about? What are you thinking about God and/or yourself?
- Are you complaining or confessing?
- Are you appealing or praising?
- How important are your needs/desires in those moments?
Or God's Glory?

As you reflect on your day, what missed opportunities of prayer were there? Why?

Daniel's story offers us a beautiful example of the strength that comes from cultivated intimacy with God. While Daniel still faced hardships, his steadfastness came from knowing and trusting God's voice above any other. As communities centered on the Gospel, with a shared goal of growing in our relationship with God, discipline is an important concept. However, discipline can be misunderstood as us muscling through something to achieve our own goals. Discipline in the Christian walk is rounded out by an understanding that our salvation and favor with God has already been secured through the work of Christ. This is an important nuance to emphasize in your groups. May our discipline come less from a place of anxiety/guilt, and more from knowing that Jesus is our true foundation.

- What would it look like to grow more disciplined in your prayer life, Bible reading, etc.?
- Do you have specific goals in these areas? How do we set goals without becoming legalistic?
- When was a time you felt strengthened through prayer?
- What is an area where you feel like you need to practice persistence in prayer?
- What is an area where you feel like God has encouraged you to rest in His sovereignty?

Prayer Time: Pray for one another's desires regarding greater discipline in communion with God. Thank Jesus that He displayed the greatest discipline and sacrifice in going to the Cross on our behalf, so that we could be secure in spite of our failures and shortcomings. Ask God to soften the hearts of those in your group, draw you to Himself through prayer and Scripture, and cultivate a lifestyle of communion with Him.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



Daniel 6:10-11 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.

Do you think it is worthwhile and valuable to meet with God every day?



Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

What holds you back from prayer becoming a discipline in your life?



James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Are your prayers characterized by endurance?

WEEK ELEVEN:
DANIEL'S PRAYER



Daniel 9:19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

Would you be okay praying for something for a long time and still waiting for its fruition?



Daniel 9:18 O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.

How can you grow in persistence and endurance?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDSPRAYERGUIDE

ELEVEN: DANIEL'S PRAYER



Persistence and discipline are valuable characteristics that we see on display in Daniel's prayer life. Just like exercising sporadically every 2-3 weeks (or years) will not result in the healthiest of bodies, having an inconsistent prayer life will not result in the healthiest of relationships with God. We must pass these characteristics on to our children.



ASK THIS: How often do you think you should pray? Why do you think we should pray? What would happen to your friendship with another person if you only talked to them every once in a while? Just like friendships require communication and diligence, so too does our relationship with God. Praying often—even multiple times a day—will go far in strengthening our relationship with God.



DO THIS: Go on a search for ants around your yard or neighborhood. Take a few minutes to watch the ants work. It would be especially fun if you can find ants bringing food back to their home. Point out that the ants never seem to stop to rest; they diligently persevere even when the task is large. **Say:** We can be diligent and persistent with our prayer life, just like the ant. Every day the ant comes out to gather, whether life is good or bad, the weather is fine or rainy, or the work is hard or easy. Praying should be like that for us! We should pray whether we are busy or calm, whether our day is good or bad, and whether we are tired or energized. The ant grows their food stash to stay healthy through the winter. We grow our relationship with God through prayer to get us through the hard times in our life!



PRAY THIS: Father, help us to be drawn to spending time with you in prayer often. Give us the desire to pray diligently and persistently in your name. Draw us near to you, nearer and nearer, each time we pray. Amen.



WEEK TWELVE:
PAUL'S PRAYER



PART 1

SERMON RECAP

Statistics and surveys today tell us that most people in America (and around the world) say that they are spiritual but not "religious." They are not interested in what would be called "institutional religion." They also say they value "spirituality" and are "spiritual" themselves. It is important in this series to understand what "spiritual-ness" actually is and is not. Paul's prayer, which we look at this week, focuses on the point that we should expect and seek profound, life-changing spiritual experiences of the love and joy of God.

There is actually something perplexing about Paul's words, because he will pray that Christ will "dwell in their hearts" (their inner being). In Ephesians 2:22, he has said Christ is already indwelling them. In Ephesians 3:18-19 he says, "I pray you'll know the love of Christ," yet there are plenty of places in the Bible that say we cannot be a Christian if we don't believe in and trust in the sacrificial saving love of Christ. Paul says that he prays that they would be "filled with all the fullness of God," yet in Ephesians 1 he says all Christians who are united to Christ by faith *are* filled with the fullness of God. Why does Paul pray that these Christians get what he says elsewhere they already have? The answer is that it's one thing to believe in and trust the love of Christ, and it's another thing to experience the love of Christ in your "inner being."

Paul's prayer is that these Christians would begin to live in what they already have, not just know it is there. He is writing to all of these Christians and praying for them, and I think he understands this is an ordinary situation for most of us. Too often, our lives are not shaped by what we claim we know as the truth (ie: what Christ did to save us in the Gospel). Paul's prayer shows us what we need! Paul prays for people with all manner of things happening in their lives, just like us. He prays they would understand how great God is because understanding the Gospel is the one thing they need. Paul's prayer is that in times of joy and persecution, when God's presence is so real and times when He feels absent, ***we may be filled with all the fullness of God.*** The fullness of God only comes by going through joy and sorrow with Him.

PAUL'S PRAYER PART 1

The power that comes into our inner being is a power to comprehend and know the love of Christ. Paul prays, "I'm praying that the Spirit will empower your inner being to know the love of Christ." He prays for an inward experience through God's Spirit where Jesus becomes as real as any other person, if not more so. "**That you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**" In the New Testament the term **fullness of God** almost always means a pattern of life, fullness of life.

Paul speaks of how we know we aren't *just* having an emotional experience, because it changes the way we live. Paul also says this happens communally ("**comprehend with all the saints.**") All the saints means not all by yourself. When we study or live in community with others, we help one another see new things.

It's one thing to believe in and trust the love of Christ, and it's another thing to experience the love of Christ in your inner being.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Ephesians 3:14-21

Colossians 9-10

Philippians 2

Ephesians 2:22

Mark 11:25

Matthew 27:46



WEEKLY EXERCISE

Communion Exercise: Have communion elements available (bread/crackers, wine/juice, etc.) and speak Gospel encouragement to one another. You can address weaknesses, “religious” performance, or any other areas that reflect broken misunderstandings of who God is. Speak of the truth of the Gospel and the implications for those in your group. What does it mean to be saints, to be truly loved children of God? Spend some time in prayer together.



COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

Paul’s prayer in his letter to the Ephesians highlights the difference between what is objectively true (reality), because of the Gospel, and what we subjectively experience as true. While we know our salvation and security are grounded in historical realities and an unchanging God, our own sense of that reality fluctuates. This is why prayer can be so important in helping us wrestle through those moments when we struggle with unbelief.

As Gospel Communities, we should remind one another that these seasons of unbelief and of feeling as if God is distant or absent are normal. However, prayer is always available to us as a way to cry out to God and process the ways we may struggle to experience His reality. As Paul shared in Ephesians 3:18, our understanding is bolstered and deepened together within community.

Read Paul's Prayer in Ephesians 3.

- What spiritual truths do you know in your head but they haven't moved into your life? Maybe they don't seem real to you?
- Do you have an understanding that the only thing you need in your life is connecting the truth of Jesus with your inner being?
- What does it look like to have an experience with Jesus? How have you sought a wrong kind of experience or have been let down after an experience doesn't last?
- How do you live in the fullness of God as a pattern of life?
- Is understanding the Gospel at the center of your being? Do you strive to bring the Gospel into situations, emotions, feelings, conversations or thoughts you have?
- How have you wrestled truths, doctrines, and texts about God to the ground?
- In what ways have you avoided or hid from wrestling with these things?
- Have you seen a healthy example of someone who wrestles with these things, who has had authentic experience with God, and has a fusion of mind and heart?
- How do we grow in experience and that fusion of mind and heart communally?
- How can we be better as a family, friends, or GC to help each other grow in experience – putting the Gospel at our very center?

Prayer Time: In a way similar to Paul, pray about the things that are true in Jesus that may *feel* real to you in a given moment. Ask God to remove obstacles of the heart that prevent you from experiencing the fullness of His love in a powerful way.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

What does your inner being look to for identity?



Ephesians 3:19-21...to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

How have you prayed that the Gospel would be made more real to you in an experiential way?



2 Timothy 1:3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

How have you prayed for others that the Gospel would be made more real in an experiential way?

WEEK TWELVE:
PAUL'S PRAYER PART 1



Psalm 139:1-3 O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

How would you like to become a slug? *(From the sermon)*



Ephesians 3:16-17 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

What does it look like to have an experience with Jesus? How have you sought a wrong kind of experience or have been let down after an experience doesn't last?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDS PRAYER GUIDE

TWELVE: PAUL'S PRAYER 1



Our cell phones are like little computers in the palm of our hand. You can do so much with them and yet we barely scratch the surface. Have you ever researched all the tools and tweaks and shortcuts that you can use on your phone? It's overwhelming.

Living in our identity as Christ followers can be sort of the same thing. We already have access to God's love and strength and power, and yet we barely scratch the surface of who we are in Christ. We are a growing, changing (hopefully for the better), transforming child of Christ, and we need to live in that truth.



ASK THIS: If you were a superhero, what powers would you have? If you didn't allow yourself to experience all of your superpowers, how would that change how you live as a superhero? While we aren't superheroes, we are children of God, and that's better than any superhero. Sometimes, even children of God don't let themselves live like they are truly loved and a part of the family of God. That's just like a superhero not using his powers. You are a very loved child of God and should live fully in that truth.



DO THIS: Gather a clean water bottle, hydrogen peroxide (must be 6% solution), 1 tablespoon of dry yeast, dishwashing liquid, and food coloring from your box. Pour 1/2 c. of hydrogen peroxide into the bottle, then add about 10 drops of food coloring.

Next you will mix 1 Tbsp. of liquid dish soap into the bottle and swish the bottle around a bit to mix it. This will create more foam in the reaction. In a separate small cup, add 3 Tablespoons warm water and the yeast. Swirl it to mix for about 30 seconds. Pour the yeast solution into the bottle and watch the foam come alive!

Say: Did you know that we can live as a Christian and not live fully the life that Christ wants for us? When we live as truly loved and accepted children of God, our everyday can come to life with God's power, just like the foam!



PRAY THIS: Father, thank you for giving us your love and life. Forgive us when we don't live in the fullness of who You are and who you have made us to be. Bring us to life so that we overflow with your goodness and bless the people around us.

WEEK THIRTEEN:
PAUL'S PRAYER
PART 2

***MORE
THAN
WE ASK***





SERMON RECAP

Last week we looked at Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3. Today we want to flesh that out in how we truly view God. We want to become a people who know that the reason we pray is not to get things from God, but to know Him better. Prayer is often misunderstood because we think it is about *getting* from God rather than *being* with God; this is why Paul prays that we would be reminded *who* God is.

"Now to Him who is able." Our God is able. Able to do what? Able to do whatever needs to be done in this world and in our lives. One writer says, *"No problem can stop Him...No circumstance can worry Him. No outcome can confuse Him."* In the middle of our circumstances, where we think our prayers aren't being heard or answered, we must remember God's "able-ness." When Paul wrote these words, he was most likely in prison suffering for the sake of the Gospel. He is most likely waiting to be executed. Yet, he speaks of God's goodness in being able to do whatever is needed.

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations... Paul is saying, "I know you are going to underestimate God; that's why I am praying the way I am. The world you live in is going to make you think too little of Him, so I want to make this clear to you: HE IS ABLE. Never doubt it." God is not a cosmic bystander; He wills and works. We will not pray if we do not believe in the deepest place of our "inner being" that our God is able...AND we will not believe our God is able if we don't spend time coming to know Him.

God changes the hearts of men and women. He softens the hard heart of Pharaoh to let His people go. He strengthens the hearts of His people to where a genocidal zealot named Saul becomes a self-sacrificing missionary named Paul.

Jesus is able to forgive sin. Imagine standing before the God of the universe, who is perfectly holy and just—He has never sinned. He sees the mess we all have made of this world He created, and we all stand guilty...yet our God forgives sins! How? By ignoring them? NO, by being just and paying for them all in Himself in Jesus; **Jesus is just and our justifier!** Our God in Jesus becomes human, suffers on a cross, and purchases our pardon to cleanse our guilt, and to free us from the penalty of the law. **Only God can do this!**

WEEK THIRTEEN: PAUL'S PRAYER PART 2

MORE THAN WE ASK

Paul prays about something that we could grasp, but that grasping is truly beyond our comprehension. He prays that we would know deep in our spirits, even when we can't put it all into words, that God's love for us is true and secure because where we are not able; He is. Instead of simply empathizing or sympathizing with us, Paul does what we should all do, turn each other back to the truth of the Gospel. There is no circumstance that can put us outside His care and His love.

Pray not just for yourself, but pray for others as you develop your relationship with God. Pray for friends, neighbors, sons, daughters, co-workers, politicians, youtubers...whoever it is God brings into your life. When you see people in your neighborhood, assume God is bringing them into your life and pray for them. Maybe as you are checking out at the store, pray for that clerk or the guy who delivers your food. When you get pulled over by that cop with red lights flashing, pray for them and know this...**our God is able.**

“

Sometimes seeing God at work in our lives is not easy when suffering is overwhelming. We are called to be joyful and yet many times our hard times test our joy in ways that we never dreamed. When our joy is tested how are we responding to others? *“Love is the flag that flies where Jesus resides in the heart.”* That is a love for God and a love for others. Will you commit to spending time with God and trusting that He is able?

”

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Ephesians 3:20-21

Ephesians 3:14-21

Hebrews 13:18



PRAYER STARTERS

This week, remind yourself (out loud!) that God is able. In good and bad times, in times of frustration, hopelessness, despair, or in the brokenness of relationships or work...God is able.

Every morning, commit to praying over what you are facing, asking God to give you a joyful confidence in His unwavering ability.



WEEKLY EXERCISE

- Speak the Gospel, point others to God.
- Remind yourself and others that God is able.
- Reflect on this prayer series journey. Review your journal.

Sunday, January 1, come prepared to share with others what you have learned, how your prayer life has grown, and how joyful confidence in God is more real than ever.

SHARE your joyful confidence in God with others – As you give Christmas gifts this week, PRAY over the gift and the person you are giving the gift to, and remind them that God is ABLE.

In this last week of our series, we focus on how we worship a God who is present and able to do anything. His faithfulness and proven ability can give us the confidence and hope to reach out to Him with our own needs and the needs of others. While it is only His will that is ultimately done, we can trust that He has the power to change hearts and transform lives. Simply put, there is nothing He cannot do.

How often do we limit ourselves in our prayers, or impose limits on what we think God might/can do? Paul's prayer reminds us to pray with boldness—even when our own faith is small. Even as we struggle to comprehend the vastness of God's love and power, He is still at work in our world.

- Do you believe God is able?
- What areas of life or needs cause you to question God's ability to act?
- How can you process those things before God, asking for greater trust in His ability?
- Fill in the blank. In my life, I wish God was able to _____.
 - o Do you look to other things to accomplish the above?
 - o In what ways is God more than able to accomplish the above?
 - o What are God's promises we see in Scripture?
 - o What if you don't see answers to the above?
- As we prepare to celebrate the Incarnation, what does Jesus' human birth reveal to us about God's power and love? How can we love better this week because God is love?
- How can you have more joyful confidence in God?

Prayer Time: Take some time to reflect on the miracle of the Incarnation and the joy of Christmas. Thank God for His nearness and the ability to approach Him at any time. Share the requests/needs you have that can seem almost outlandish to us, with the knowledge that our God is able.

DAILY REFLECTIONS



Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen

Have you ever felt guilt for not praying enough, or with enough faith?



Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen

Do you believe God is able?



Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen

Do you have the same confidence in Jesus during the good and bad times?

WEEK THIRTEEN: PAUL'S PRAYER PART 2

MORE THAN WE ASK



Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen

How does God provide?



Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen

Where do you want to see God work in your life?



Read, pray, and journal as you feel led.

EKIDS PRAYER GUIDE

THIRTEEN: PAUL'S PRAYER 2



Gifts are awesome. Giving gifts, receiving gifts...it can all be so much fun! Have you ever gotten a gift that blew you away? It was way more than you expected, almost to the point you didn't know how to accept it? God wants to do that with us! *Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.* God wants to lavish us with His love, His grace, and His mercy.



ASK THIS: What is the best gift you have ever been given? Why was that gift so special to you? God loves to give good gifts to His children. He is a generous and loving father. In fact, He gave us the gift of His son, Jesus, who died and rose again so that we could live in relationship with Him. He didn't have to, He didn't need to. He did it because He is a good Father who loves to give to His children.



DO THIS: Gather a small cardboard tube, a piece of fabric to fit over the end of the tube, a rubber band, and bubble solution from your box. Place the fabric on the end of the tube and secure with the rubber band. Dip the fabric end of the tube into the bubble solution and have your kids blow air through the tube to make bubbles. Ask your kids: **How many bubbles did you expect to make? Was this more than you expected? It's exciting to be surprised by good things! Our Father loves to give us way more than we expect! Not just gifts you can hold and see, but gifts we might not think about all the time, like love and mercy. How does it make you feel that we have a God who wants to give to us abundantly?**



PRAY THIS: Father, thank you for being a God that loves His kids. You are so generous. You sent your son Jesus, to die for us while we were still not living for you. We can see your good gifts all around us and within us. Thank you for loving us.

WHAT'S NEXT?

You've probably noticed that this next week begins on Christmas Day, December 25th. While Element is not having services on Christmas Day, we encourage you to reflect on the miracle of the Incarnation—God with us—and what this means for you. It is through Jesus' coming to earth as a human that God pursued intimacy and presence with us; this is all part of His plan for redemption. As you reflect on this truth, we encourage you to go to God in prayer with your wonder, gratitude, and other responses to who He is.

We thank you for joining us on this journey, and we hope that you have been grown in your prayer life! We are eager to see what stirs in our church community as we grow into a more prayerful people.

So...in parting, reflect on this prayer series journey, review your journal (if you used one), and next Sunday, Jan 1st, come prepared to share with others during a special Sunday service that will look a little different from typical services. We will explore how God has moved in the lives of His people at Element through prayer.

In closing, on the next page, we wanted to offer a prayer and encourage you to pray through it on Christmas Morning.

God bless you and Merry Christmas!

A PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS MORNING:

All glory and honour to You, Living God.
You made our world by Your wisdom,
and You sent Your Wisdom into the world.
You rule all things by Your word,
and You caused Your Word to dwell among us.
You filled heaven and earth with Your glory,
and You made the the very Radiance of Your Glory
to shine on earth.
You gave us life and created us in Your image,
and You have given us eternal life through Your eternal Image.
You formed us to be Your children,
and now Your eternal Son has come to claim us for
brothers and sisters.

—
Heavenly Father, Your Son became poor,
and now we share in His riches.
He came to be despised and rejected,
and now You have accepted us through Him.
You laid our sins on Him,
and now we come to You with His righteousness.
You sent Him to live the life that we failed to live,
and now we have His life in us.
By Your will, He came as a slave,
and now we reign with Him.
He was conceived, lived, died and rose by Your Spirit,
and now He has given that Spirit to us.

—
Renew us therefore, by that same Spirit, we pray.
By Him, unite us to Jesus so we bear much fruit and bring You glory.
By Him, fill our hearts so we cry out to You with the voice of Your Son.
By Him, bind us together in the gospel of Jesus and speak the truth in love.
By Him, transform us to the image of our Lord, with ever-increasing glory.
By His power, deliver us from discouragement and idolatry,
and fill our hearts and lives and mouths with grace,
By Him, make us proof of your manifold wisdom before the powers and
authorities, so that the powers of darkness should not prevail,
and we might press on through the night to the dawn;
warmed by the light of Your Son.
Amen.







ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DIVING DEEPER: FASTING

BY MIKE HARMAN

This book has been designed to focus on our understanding, experience, and practice of prayer. We also thought it would be helpful to include some information regarding fasting, as you may have heard about fasting in combination with prayer.

I have heard it said that the practice of fasting (abstaining from eating) should be called slowing, and not fasting, because time feels like it slows down when fasting; hunger makes the end of the fast feel a long way off and slow in coming.

Fasting involves a determined period of time when we willingly choose to deny ourselves something physical. It could be food, television, social media, hobby, sweets, alcohol, sugar, or any such thing. The denial of those things is not to win the favor of God, but to reveal our own hearts, in the midst of our hardship in order to see how we can love God and serve others in genuine worship.

In some ways, fasting is similar to other Christian practices or spiritual rhythms in that we want to grow our relationship with God by actively engaging in it (just like baptism, communion, Bible reading, and study). There is nothing magical about fasting; we don't twist God's arm to notice us or do our will by the practice, but these activities can help us to grow in our focus and relationship with God.

Isaiah 58:3-11 "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

Mathew Henry says: "*A fast is a day to afflict the soul; if it does not express true sorrow for sin, and does not promote the putting away of sin, it is not a fast.*" The people addressed in Isaiah 58 had shown sorrow on the occasioned fasts, but they still indulged pride, covetousness, and malignant passions. These verses speak to fasting being more than sacrifice, more than religious behavior, and more than mere observance. God desires changed lives that live on mission for the least of society. To be merciful is more acceptable to God than mere fasting; without mercy and an honest heart, fasting is vain and hypocritical. A true fast results in people, families, neighborhoods, churches, or nations, showing repentance and sorrow for sin.

Earlier this year, in the last message of the James series, we talked about how we should pray until we *pray* and sing until we *sing*. By this, I mean we should press through difficulties, distractions, and barriers to these spiritual practices. I would like to add that we should fast until we *fast*—persevering through the obstacles that can keep us from moving into the spiritual experience and expression of connecting with God in deeper relationship.

Obstacles expect when fasting are the cravings for that which we give up, unrealized expectations of what we will experience, or guilt and/or shame for falling short in our fast. Our failure should not define our fast because there are benefits to fasting with prayer:

- Fasting can provide additional time and space by freeing us from some distractions

- Fasting can help us be aware of the control and dominance that certain habits or desires have over us that keep us from deeper trust in God
- When we hunger and crave that which we are fasting, it can serve to remind us of God, to pray and to seek Him
- Fasting enables us to say no to something while making us more aware of our need for Jesus, rather than living in our own strength
- Fasting can help heal our hearts by orienting them from the physical hungers/drives to a right hunger for God

Psalm 27:4 One thing I have desired of the Lord, one thing that I will seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple.

This is the most basic prayer from a well-ordered heart. A rightly ordered heart can come when we persist in fasting, understanding that it is God alone who can satisfy our need and hunger.

Prayer ought to begin with God, and fasting ought to help remind us that our lives do not solely consist of material things. Fasting helps to reorient our lives with God at the center, turning our heart from self-centeredness to focus on God.

The physical suffering and denial of fasting can shock us out of the illusion of self-sufficiency and blindness that hardens our hearts, opening the way for an honest prayer life.

In light of this information on fasting, spend some time asking God to reveal if there is something He would like you to fast from for a given time period.

DIVING DEEPER: INTERCESSORY PRAYER

BY VICKY BURG

Through this journey we are looking at the concept of prayer. We are (re)learning that it means talking to God and bringing our praises, worship, cares, and concerns to Him...but what is intercessory prayer? Is it special prayer hopped up on steroids? Is it super-charged prayer that gets special notice from God? Are only certain Christians designated as intercessory pray-ers?

All of us, as Christians, are called to pray, both for ourselves and others, our institutions, our church—anything that is a part of our daily lives. Have you ever felt a heavy burden on your heart to pray for people around you, your local community, a nation, or the world as a whole? That is intercessory prayer. Have you been troubled by political changes or do you feel the urge to lift others up in prayer? That is intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer is when a person “stands in the gap” for others and pleads with God on their behalf through persistent prayer—and it is something all believers can do. It is important to remember that Jesus Christ is the true intercessor, because He stands in the gap between God and humanity as our Advocate, interceding for us before the Father. He is always interceding for us (Romans 8:34). Because of Jesus, there is no longer a “gap” between God and His followers, yet we, the Church, can continue to plead on behalf of unbelievers (for salvation and other needs) and believers (for needs) alike.

The act of praying on behalf of others in an unselfish expression of love, which reflects the perfect, sacrificial love of Jesus is intercessory prayer. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, we can approach the throne of God with confidence and ask God to grant our requests according to His will. We can come with a joyful heart of praise. We can come with a broken and repentant heart, recognizing our unworthiness. But through it all we acknowledge that we need God’s help in our lives. As one author puts it, “True intercessory prayer seeks not only to know the will of God and see it fulfilled, but to see it fulfilled whether or not it benefits us and regardless of what it costs us. True intercessory prayer seeks God’s glory, not our own.”

Through intercessory prayer, we take on the burdens of those around us who are going through difficult situations or trials and pour out our hearts before God on their behalf.

WHY?

When we step out in prayer on behalf of those around us, we build relationships/support our community. In addition, our prayers connect us with God and make us more aware of His presence. Prayer helps our focus in difficult circumstances, as our eyes move off ourselves and our surroundings and toward God, His will, and the work He is doing. Prayer is one Christian gesture unbelievers may be willing to accept from us. Prayer creates community and connection as we ask about others' needs, pray, and then follow up to find out how they're doing.

HOW?

Prayer is a continuing conversation that God has started through His Word and provided by His grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with Him. We should feel free to pour out to Him whatever is on our heart—our problems, trials, worries, joys, and praises for Him and who He is—really, anything we want to say to God. Sometimes, however, the Holy Spirit lays a particular burden on our heart for the needs of others. As He calls many of us to pray over our marriages, families, schools, government leaders, and our nation, this gives new meaning to God's command to, "pray without ceasing." In praying our requests to God, we acknowledge that He's in control and will answer our prayers in His will and in His time. We pray in faith, and we wait for God to answer! We come to prayer in humility, believing we need help, and we humbly ask God to intervene.

A FORMAT FOR INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Start with your focus on God, with worship and thanks for who He is, His grace and mercy that allows us to come to Him, for His Son, and our salvation. Quiet yourself before Him and wait for Him as you seek His presence.

Next, examine your own heart – is there any sin the Spirit has brought to your awareness as you come before Him? You are called to repent and confess, coming before Him with a humble and contrite heart, and receiving the joy of His forgiveness and grace.

Your intercession really begins with the needs that God has laid on your heart – souls in need of salvation, encouragement and equipping of the saints, healing for the sick and suffering, ministries, missions, your government leaders, and for your world.

Repeat. When we stand in the gap for others, we want to be in persistent prayer. Find ways to remember to pray for others and situations regularly, and in different ways. That is intercessory prayer.

DIVING DEEPER: PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

Prayer is our expression of submission to and need of God. It is one of the ways that we acknowledge who God is. Prayer is not just talking ... it also involves listening. Growing in unceasing prayer starts with creating space to learn how to pray.

Use Dick Eastman's prayer wheel adapted from his book *The Hour That Changes the World* for creating the space to learn how to pray. For a one-hour version, take five minutes for each segment and read the corresponding scripture as you go through each segment. For a half-hour version, take three minutes to go through each segment.

1	Up to 5 mins	Praise and Worship <i>Psalm 63:3</i> Begin this time of prayer by praising, worshipping, and recognizing God's nature. Take this time to praise and worship Him for who He is.
2	Up to 5 mins	Waiting on the Lord <i>Psalm 46:10</i> Waiting on the Lord means a silent soul surrender to God and His will. Ask him to give you the strength to surrender everything of your life to Him.
3	Up to 5 mins	Confession of Guilt and Sin <i>Psalm 139:23</i> This is probably the heaviest portion of this prayer time. This is the time to confess your idolatry and your rebellion against God. Ask Him to search you and know you.
4	Up to 5 mins	Praying Scripture <i>Ephesians 3:14–21</i> In this prayer time, read and respond to scripture. Read and pray through Psalm 8 as you take this time to pray through scripture.
5	Up to 5 mins	Watching <i>Colossians 4:2</i> Be on the alert! In these minutes, pray for the Lord to keep you aware and ready while praying. The enemy wants to hinder and distract you, but Jesus wants us to stand firm against those attacks.

6	Up to 5 mins	<p>Intercession <i>1 Timothy 2:1-4</i> Prayer of intercession is a powerful prayer. Take this time to pray for the lost, maybe someone you know specifically or the people group you are trying to reach.</p>
7	Up to 5 mins	<p>Petitions <i>Matthew 7:7</i> What are your needs? Philippians 4 says to bring your requests before God. Come to Him in humility and meekness, yet with a boldness as His dearly loved children.</p>
8	Up to 5 mins	<p>Thanksgiving <i>1 Thessalonians 5:18</i> Even in the midst of hard and challenging times, you can express your thankfulness to Jesus for His continued faithfulness and for what He has done and will continue to do.</p>
9	Up to 5 mins	<p>Singing <i>Psalms 100:2</i> Singing by yourself or in a small group can seem uncomfortable at first. However, singing is one way of expressing our worship to God. Even if it is simple, sing to Him for His greatness, love, kindness, etc. Do not be ashamed to sing to the God who created you and knows you intimately.</p>
10	Up to 5 mins	<p>Contemplation/Meditation <i>Joshua 1:8</i> In this time, meditate on the words of what God has said. Be still and contemplate the promises that God has made.</p>
11	Up to 5 mins	<p>Listening <i>Ecclesiastes 5:2</i> It may seem unusual at first to sit for up to five minutes, quiet your mind, and just listen to what God might have to say. You may not hear Him say anything in this time to you, but just listen and practice quieting your mind.</p>
12	Up to 5 mins	<p>Praise <i>Psalms 52:9</i> End this time of prayer with praising Him! How exciting is it that we get to come before this great and holy God, Yahweh, and pray directly to Him? Praise Him for how great He is and the work He has done in your life.</p>

CONTINUED: PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

GET AWAY & ALONE

The only way you will develop a consistent and effective prayer life is if you intentionally set aside time and make space to listen and be alone.

Get rid of distractions. Write down any distracting thoughts in a journal so that you can keep focused and return to those items later to address them. Also, you can often turn distracting thoughts into prayers. Practice praying out loud when alone.

PRACTICE IN GROUPS

The early church regularly prayed together. Corporate prayer represents our collective unity and cry to God. Praying with others is a great way to learn how to pray. You can learn new ways others pray, new things to pray about, and even how to pray for longer periods of time.

A PATTERN FOR PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer was not meant to be a rigid prayer to be said word-for-word. It was meant to be used as a template to help us learn how to pray. Walk through the Lord's Prayer below for a helpful tool in learning how to pray.

Matthew 6:7-13

Our Father in Heaven

- Start in the posture of a child. (I love to give my children good gifts ... so does our Father in Heaven!)
- Remember His love for you expressed in Jesus as you approach Him. (You can do it boldly!)
- You stand in the same place as Jesus.
- Rehearse the truths of the Gospel and invite the Spirit to remind you of all of that is true of Jesus and who you are in Him.

Hallowed Be Your Name

- Move toward praise and thanksgiving.
- Praise Him for who He is and thank Him for what He has done.
- Use the Psalms to help you with this if necessary.

Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done

- Commit yourself to His will.
- Pray kingdom prayers ... that what is true in heaven will be true here.
- Pray for His rule and reign over your life and where you are able to influence the world to see His rule and reign.
- Ask Him to reveal any place in which you are not seeking His kingdom first.

Give Us . . . Our Daily Bread

- Ask Him to meet your basic needs.
- Bring your petitions before Him.
- Bring the needs of others before Him.

Forgive Us Our Debts . . .

- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal unbelief or rebellion.
- Acknowledge it as sin and ask Him to forgive you.
- Extend forgiveness to others.

Lead Us Not into Temptation

- Ask the Spirit to reveal areas of weakness or vulnerability to the evil one.
- Ask for power to overcome sin and deliverance from the evil one.



PRAYER

Prayer is how we grow into deeper intimacy with God, yet to so many people, it feels out of their reach. Our goal through the next 13 weeks is to make prayer more tangible and relatable. We want you to begin to pray (if you never have), pray more authentically, and spend time with God in ways that He becomes the object of your worship. In every religion in the world, prayer is central to what communion with God is supposed to look like...it is the heart of what we believe. As with any relationship, communication is central. By knowing who Jesus is and experiencing His grace, we will encounter Him and grow in faith and maturity. Hopefully in a few weeks you will understand our definition of prayer, which is adapted from Tim Keller's book on prayer: "Prayer is a continuing conversation that God has started through His Word and provided by His grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with Him."

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