

Learning The Discipline of Prayer

A Prayer Strategy



From 60 Seconds to 60 Minutes in Prayer

Part I

Intimacy With God

*Come with me by yourselves
to a quiet place and get some rest. – Mark 6:31*

by Richard W. LaFountain

The Secret of Intercession

The secret of intercession is not more lists, or adding more hours of tedious monologues addressed to an unformed God. The secret of intercession is in the relationship. It is about enjoying being with God, not about getting stuff from God. If you don't enjoy being with God, if you never or seldom, sense his presence, and if you are too much in a hurry to spend any significant amount of time with God, you probably will not become an effective intercessor. Intercessors are first and foremost "God-lovers." They have fallen in love with the "Lover of their Soul." The Creator has become their intimate Companion and Friend. They love to pray because they love to be in the presence of God. This love affair drives their lives and hastens them daily to the closet of prayer. They steal time to be with him. They cheat themselves of food, pleasures, fun and games, and fellowship for the sake of a moment with the Savior. Like Mary, Lazarus' sister, they have chosen the better part – to sit at Jesus' feet and be awed in his presence.

Most people fail to pray, not because they are lazy, or don't care. They fail to pray because they do not know the lover of their souls. They know of him, about him, but they don't know him intimately. They are too busy, too talkative, too hurried, too people-oriented to seek out the pearl of great price. Prayer time is too costly for them. It is boring because their love of the Savior is lukewarm. There is no fire in their heart for God. They don't long after him. In fact, they may get along fairly well without him. So why pray, except when there is a dire crisis? God is their Firefighter, not their friend.

Loving God passionately is a learned discipline. Few find it because they are not willing to search for Him. Time is their lord and master. They serve the clock, their lists of to-do's, their schedules, their itineraries, their day-timers, but they have no leisure time to lavish on God.

The following chapters are lessons in six steps toward building an intimate and enjoyable love relationship with God. It will cost you something. It will cost you time. The more you give to it the more you will get out of it. Just like the old soda pop bottles informed the user, "No deposit, no return." "No pain, no gain." Like any athletic competition or any skill we develop, practice will make perfect. Without a lavish investment of time there will be no lasting result.

Begin your prayer adventure by learning the first step first. Learn to be quiet, to be still. Learn to slow down, and focus on God alone. Learn the art of "focus" – the discipline of the mind. Settle down in God's presence until there is no hurry left in you. Learn to daily put away your "to-do lists." Shut your prayer closet door to sound, movement and distractions. Learn to lay yourself before God as a living sacrifice. Be patient. Be still, God will come, but you must wait for him.

Once you have learned the skill of being still and quiet you can move on to the next step, which is worship. Once you learn that you can move to thanksgiving, and so on, until you have mastered each of the six steps of intimacy with God. "How long will this take?" You ask. Well, that depends on the person, but know this God is not in a hurry. Neither should we be. (I suspect 6 weeks is just a beginning, it took me nearly two years!) Slow down and let God catch up to you. I use the three-minute egg timer to help me in the process of slowing down. You may find it useful too.

Step 1 – BE STILL

Without a doubt the most difficult step in intercessory prayer is this one – keep silence, be still. Learn this step and you will transform your prayer life. Remember, your mind is like an undisciplined child running constantly and refusing to be dominated. It wants its own way. It is like a wild stallion that does not want to be tamed, bridled or ruled. It wanders wherever it wishes. It clamors for its own way. It speeds ahead to its own agenda. It refuses to be brought under control. But God says it must be bridled. Peter urges us to “*gird up the loins of your mind.*” (1 Peter 1:13) Paul says, “*Bring every thought into the captivity of Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 10:5)

A Secret

There is a secret that God reveals to his servants that is hidden from all other men. It is the secret of his presence. He delights to walk and talk with us but he will only do so in the “*Secret place of the Most High.*” Therefore David exalts the mystery of that secret retreat with God alone where God shadows over his own with his protective presence. Jesus said that the secret place for believers is the “*closet of prayer*” in Matthew 6:6. The Greek word translated in KJV is “*tameion*” which means a closet, secret or inner chamber, or a storehouse – thus “a closet.” He is very specific about it. “When you have entered into your “*tameion*” (secret chamber), shut the door...and pray in secret!” God longs to have that romantic secret chamber of interlude with each of us.

A Command (not a suggestion)

God has given his people express commands governing the turbulence of their own hearts and the peace that he offers and expects. None stands out so markedly as Isaiah 30:15 “*In quietness and confidence will be your strength and you would not...*” It declares that the Lord's purpose is for his people to return to Him to find quietness and confidence before Him. The indictment was that his people “WOULD NOT,” therefore they had no peace.

- Psalm 4:4 “*Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.*”
- Psalm 46:10 “*Be still and know that I am thy God...*”
- Isaiah 30:15 “*In quietness and confidence will be your strength and you would not...*”
- Isaiah 32:17 “*The effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever.*”
- Isaiah 41:1 “*Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment.*”
- I Kings 19:12 “*After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.*”
- Ecclesiastes 3:7 “*A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*”
- Habakkuk 2:20 “*But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.*”
- Mark 4:39 “*And he arose and rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, Peace be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*”
- Revelation 8:1 “*And there was silence in heaven for about the space of a half hour.*”

It is the mandate of God that we still ourselves before him in order to find his peace and hear his voice. So thus we have as the first and most important step in the believer's prayer life to still ourselves before the Lord.

Priority – “I set the Lord always before me...”

What is first in your life? David testified that he always, meaning every day, “*set the Lord before me.*” (Psalm 16:8) The word used here is the same used in Exodus 20:3 for the command “*to have (to place) no other Gods before Him.*” God is a jealous God and will not share his glory with another. (Exodus 34:14) There is room for only one on the Throne of Omnipotence. Either God, the Lord, is first and supreme and before all others or someone (maybe you?), or something else is first (your agenda, day-timer?) and on the throne. Jesus indicates the same priority theme in Matthew 6:33 when he commands that we “*Seek first the kingdom of God and everything else will fall in place.*”

Listen – Hear His Voice

We live in a busy, noisy, tumultuous society. There is noise and constant demands for our attention every waking hour. There may not be any quiet Judean hillsides for us to retreat to daily for prayer. Therefore we must find an inner solitude in the Lord's presence.

Elijah, the mighty prevailing intercessor, learned this lesson when in weariness of the battle he fled into the wilderness. God sent first the wind and storm, then the earthquake and finally the fire. But God was not in them. After this there was “*a still small voice.*” God was found, not in the spectacular, but in the stillness.

Quiet Rest

Rest is important to God. The tireless Creator rested the seventh day from all his work. He commands us to do the same on the Lord's Day. He enforced the year of Jubilee for the land to rest. So too, he wants us to rest in Him. Get this message from Isaiah 40. “*The Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint, neither is He weary...*” But they that wait on the Lord will renew their strength. God doesn't need to rest, we do!

Isaiah 40:28-31

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? *there is* no searching of his understanding. 29 He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: 31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.

Wait on the Lord

In the age of cell phones, microwaves, satellite TVs, high speed computers, and nano-second processing, we don't like to wait. But waiting on God is an important biblical principle. Most of us are in a constant frenetic hurry. We don't like to wait. We don't have time to wait.

Waiting is a waste of time. So we don't wait and we miss God's train of blessing. Waiting is part of the blessing of prayer. It requires that we put aside the rush of life and sit still and just wait. The point of prayer is not getting stuff from God. The point of prayer is getting God!

Take skiing for example. The thrill of skiing is not in the arrival at the bottom of the hill, but in the joy of getting there – so it is with seeking God. The delight of prayer is not getting the answers, but being in the presence of the One who freely gives us all things.

- Psalms 27:14 Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.
- Psalms 37:7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him.
- Isaiah 30:18 And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD *is* a God of judgment: blessed *are* all they that wait for him.

One Desire – To Behold His Beauty

David again is a wonderful example of one who learned about the secret place of stillness before God. He declares, “*One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek after.*” What is that one thing that consumed his desire? It was to behold the beauty of the Lord, then secondly to inquire in his temple. Beholding God’s beauty begins in the quiet place of stillness. Then it blossoms into worship, the second step of our intercessory prayer strategy. One desire... what is yours?

Songs of Quietness:

- There is a Quiet Place: There is a quiet place, far from the noise and pace, where God can soothe the troubled heart. Sheltered by tree and flower, and in that quiet hour, we find a new, new day.
- In the Garden: I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses, and the voice I hear falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses. And he walks with me and he talks with me. And he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.
- Be Still My Soul: Be still my soul, the Lord is on they side. Bear patiently thy cross of grief or pain. Leave to thy God to order and provide. In every change he faithful will remain.

Try singing these songs quietly, even mentally, to help quiet your heart and mind.

On no other step is it more important to begin and continue to use the 3-minute timer. It is the only way I know of to make myself be still before the throne.



The secret is in the discipline of laying aside everything else until your heart, mind and spirit are quiet before God. God says, “Be still!” The choice to obey him or not is up to you. Obedience begins here.

Even Heaven requires sil ence

*Revelation 8:1 And when he had opened the seventh seal,
there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.*

As you attempt to train yourself in these prayer disciplines remember that learning new habits takes time. Don't try to apply all of the steps at the same time. May I suggest that you discipline yourself in this step of silence only for at least 4 weeks, 10 minutes per day before going on to the next step.

Practical Disciplines

1. Enter into your secret chamber, your closet. Find a quiet undisturbed place. Once you are alone before God "*Shut the door.*" Block out all distractions but God Himself.
2. Kneel or lay prostrate in the Lord's presence. (Only under real medical prohibition should you do otherwise. Kneeling or prostrate are worship positions.) You need not be uncomfortable but neither should you be lazy in prayer. Philippians 2:10-11 "*every knee shall bow...confessing Jesus as Lord.*"
3. Make your mind a sanctuary. Make your mind stop its commotion and noise! Listen to the din of confused voices reminding you of duties, tasks and obligations. Then silence them! Your mind is not a noisy playground. It is a sanctuary. Your mind is yours. Make it obey you.
4. Slow down! Remember "relax" is the word for "be still" in Hebrew. Consciously loosen the tension of every muscle. It won't come naturally so work at learning to be quiet! 1 Thessalonians 4:11 "*Study (force yourself) to be quiet.*"
5. Set apart a significant amount of time to learn this slowing down process. Give yourself time to slow down. You cannot stop a train on a dime. It takes time to slow down to a stop. You cannot get still in 10 seconds and often it takes more than a 3-minute timer. 10 minutes is a good target, but it might not be long enough. Give God some room to work in you.
6. Fix your eyes on Jesus - behold the beauty of the Lord. Like the angels in heaven and all creatures before the throne present yourself to God in stillness. Imagine yourself prostrate at his feet before his throne.
7. Take a few deep breaths. At first take long slow deep breaths. Hold it a few seconds. Let it out slowly. Control it! You'll be amazed at how it begins to quiet your body, which in turn affects thoughts too. Remember, if you cannot control your body, you cannot expect to control your spirit either. 1 Corinthians 9:27 "*...I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection...*"
8. Refuse to go on to the next step until the body and mind have obeyed you. If they are not subject to your will, neither will be the rest of your thoughts in prayer. If you cannot bring your own body and mind into subjection how will you wrestle with spiritual forces and win? Proverbs 24:10 "*If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.*"

*And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea,
Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. – Mark 4:39*

Step 2 – Worship

“The Father seeks such to worship him.”

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” – John 4:23-24

To worship God is to seek his face, that is, to see the Lord in his beauty by meditating on Him and extolling (proclaiming) his worth. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and was forever changed (Is. 6:1-8). Jesus said that the Father is seeking worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth. God desires for us to seek after him in steadfast worship beholding his beauty.

- *The fear (reverence and awe) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.* – Proverbs 9:10
 - *And the people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits.* – Daniel 11:32
 - *Delight yourself also in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart.* – Psalm 37:4
 - *One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.* – Psalm 27:4
 - *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:* – 1 Peter 2:9
 - *But you are holy, O thou that inhabits the praises of Israel.* – Psalms 22:3
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Behold His Beauty

The worship part of intercession is to behold the beauty of the Lord. That means to take time to muse, meditate, and focus on who God is in all His splendor and glory, until the truth of His greatness fills us with awe, adoration, love. True worship is to quietly, deliberately look into the kaleidoscope of God's character, and then stand in awe of His matchless beauty. Remember that Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and was never the same. This was not a worship service in the Temple or Synagogue. It was private worship, “on-your-face-before-a-living-God” worship. It stirred the heart and cleansed the soul. David said his one overriding supreme desire was this. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. – Psalms 27:4

In Spirit and In Truth

Jesus authenticated private worship experience when he clarified for the woman at the well in Samaria that worship had nothing to do with temples made with hands. (John 4:23-24) Solomon too revealed that when at the dedication of the Great Temple in Jerusalem he confessed... *“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?”* (1 Kings 8:27 and Stephen quotes him in Acts 7:48 *“Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet.”*)

Confined Worship

Too often we Christians make the mistake of confining our worship to the house of God. Worship is personal adoration expressed directly to God himself. It has little to do with formal services, and music. It has everything to do with loving God with all one's heart, mind, soul, strength and expressing that love emotionally and verbally. Jesus said, "*The Father seeks such to worship him.*" "Worship in spirit" is not referring to the Holy Spirit, but to the spirit of man – his emotions, his soul, his innermost being. Each day of our lives we as believers, the blood-bought redeemed ones, should seek to fervently worship God in our spirit.

Who Is He?

Would to God that we would learn the secret of His presence in learning to worship the Lord for who he is, not just for all the things He has done. I am afraid for all of us too often our praise is not real worship or adoration but fumbling attempts to "do praise" so that we can get on with the real business interest of our prayer – the asking. True worship has nothing to do with getting. True worship is worship in truth, that is, worshipping God for who he truly is. Who is God? What is He like? God has revealed himself in His word. Worship is reviewing who he is according to that revelation. To know the Lord is to hold him in highest "awe," and to stand amazed in his presence. True worship melts the heart before the heat of God's personal revelation. "No man can look on him and live."

Worship is Action – Exalt the Lord!

Worship is not a quiet thing. It demands expression both verbally and physically. Angels and cherubim do it constantly before the throne. Worship is our invitation to join them.

Read the book of Revelation of Jesus Christ and you will find physical and verbal declarations of the worth and holiness of God. People fell down and worshiped. You cannot truly worship and be quiet or still. To exalt the Lord requires your personal investment. It involves all of you. Peter expresses the physical and dynamic declaration of God's worth when he says, "*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*" – 1 Peter 2:9 We are to SHOW FORTH his praises, not just say praises. The word "show forth" is one word in Greek, "exaggello" which literally is "to message forth" or to make known by praising, proclaiming, or celebration. "Aggelos" is angel or "messenger of God" who heralds God's glory. The Hebrew "Shofar," or trumpet, introduced worship with a loud, long blast, so too, we are to trumpet God's praises loudly, just as angels do before the throne. Psalm 66 verses 1-3 is worth our full attention as David instructs us in the art of worship. "Shout to God, Sing to God, Make his praise glorious, Say to God." Psalm 68:4 continues the instruction, "Sing to God, Sing praise to His name, extol Him who rides on the clouds, rejoice before Him."

To Know the Lord

Paul declared his goal in life was to "know the Lord in the power of his resurrection." Daniel similarly praises those who truly know the Lord as ones who will do exploits. (Daniel 11:32) He who knows God by showing forth his praises will do valiantly. He will be victorious.

Worship Verbs

1. Praise - (yadah) - to throw, shoot arrows, cast laud, praise
2. Give Glory - (yahab) - make shine, to give glory, to bring splendor, to ascribe worth,
3. Magnify - (gadal) - to cause to grow, to make great, powerful, to magnify
4. Worship - (shachah) - to bow down, prostrate oneself, to crouch before superior in homage
5. Exalt / Extol - (ruwm) - to raise, to heave high, to lift up lofty, to be exalted above
6. Sing - (zamar) - to make music, to sing with voice, to play a musical instrument
7. Ascribe - (nathan) - to give, bestow, grant, permit, ascribe, employ, devote
8. Bless - (barak) - to kneel, to salute, to congratulate
9. Declare - tell of - (caphar) - to count, recount, relate, to number, take account of, reckon
10. Shout - (ranan) - to cry out, a loud shout of joy, a ringing cry (in joy, exultation, praise)
11. Delight in - (anag) - to be happy about, take exquisite pleasure in, to make merry over
12. Honor - (tiph'arah) - to glory, of rank, renown, as attribute of God, make beautiful
13. Behold - (chazah) - (means to wash off one's face) to see, to perceive, to look at
14. Love - (racham) - have tender affection, deep love
15. Clap - (taqa) - to give a blast, give a blow, to strike or applaud
16. Lift up hands - (nasa') - to raise, raise up high, to bear, hold high
17. Bow down - (kara) - curve over, sink down to one's knees,

Worship With Scripture

Use the Scriptures to prime the pump of praise by reminding yourself of God's greatness.
Psalm 111, 112, 113, 117, 134, 144, 145, 147, 148, 149, 150

Exalt His Holy Name(s)

(There are over 600 descriptive names of God and Christ)

1. Jehovah-tsidkenu = The Lord our Righteousness
2. Jehovah-shalom = The Lord our Peace
3. Jehovah-shammah = The Lord our Who is There Ever Present
4. Jehovah-m'kaddesh = The Lord our Sanctifier
5. Jehovah-jireh = The Lord our Provider
6. Jehovah-rohi = The Lord our Shepherd
7. Jehovah-nissi = The Lord our Banner
8. Jehovah-rophe = The Lord our Healer
9. Jehovah-saboath = Lord of Hosts

Practical Worship Strategies

1. Read Scripture that exalts Who He is. (Prime the pump with Scripture)
2. Sing songs to the Lord. (Sing out loud!)
3. Exalt His Names. (Magnify his names)
4. Remember His mighty works. (Think on, Meditate on)
5. Tell of His excellent greatness. (Rehearse it to Him)
6. Acknowledge His Sovereignty, Power, Wisdom, Control. (Lord you are...")
7. Physically express your worship and adoration. (Lift hands, lay prostrate, kneel)

Alpha and Omega Praise

Praise His name through the alphabet. Lift up and exalt God's names beginning with A and end with Z. (Alpha and Omega - 26 Praises) Do it together in the congregation. Attempt to give 3-5 on each letter. It is a wonderful experience, especially when people read their praise of Him from the Word. There are more than 600 names of God and the Lord Jesus Christ in Scripture. To review and rejoice in his name is to truly know him and make his splendor known. Believe me, you won't run out of praises.

A = Ark, Alpha, Altogether lovely, Almighty God, Advocate, Author, Ancient of Days, Anchor
B = Bread, Balm of Gilead, Bright Morning Star, Breath, Beauty, Beginning, Best gift, Branch, Bride
C = Creator, Captain, Comforter, Counselor
D = Door, Defender, Deliverer, Daystar
E = Everlasting Father, Everything to me, Earnest of our inheritance
F = Faithful High Priest, Father, Friend of Sinners, Firstborn, Fairest of 10,000, First and Last
G = God of All Comfort, Great God, Good Shepherd, Giver, Gift, Guide, Glory and Lifter of my head
H = Healer, Helper, Health, Holy One, Heir of all, High Priest, Hope of the ages
I = Immanuel, Invisible, Immortal, I Am
J = Judge, Jehovah-*, Jesus,
K = King of Kings, King - *, Keeper
L = Lover of my soul, Lord strong and mighty, Lord *, Lamb, Light Life, Lilly of Valley
M = Maker, Master, Marvelous One, Mighty God, Mediator
N = Never-failing God, Name above all names, Nest, New and living way
O = Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent
P = Protector, Provider, Physician, Prince of Peace, my Peace, Passover, Priest forever, Promise
Q = Quickening One, Quickening Spirit, Quietness and my confidence
R = Resurrection, Redeemer, Rock, Refuge, Righteous One, My Righteousness
S = Savior, Sanctifier, Sun, Shield, Shade, Shepherd, Sure, Shelter, Source
T = Teacher, Tower, Transformer, Truth
U = Unmovable, Unspeakable Gift, Upholder of all things,
V = Victor, Vine, Vision
W = Water, Wonderful, Way, Wisdom, Worthy, Wing under which I trust
X = Xcellent, Xaminer or my heart, Xray of truth
Y = Yeshua, Yesterday, Today, Forever,
Z = Zeal of Lord,

Keeper, Shade Upon Right Hand, Shield, Defender, Refuge, Fortress, High Tower, Ancient of Days, Creator, Friend, Glory and Lifter of my head, King of Glory, Lord Strong and Mighty, Lord of Hosts, Very Present Help in Trouble, Well of Salvation, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Altogether Lovely, Balm of Gilead, Branch, Lilly of the Valley, Chiefest Among Ten Thousand, Defense, Deliverer, Desire of all Nations, Despised by the People, Diadem of Beauty, Fountain of Life, Friend that Sticketh Closer than a Brother, Refiner, Guide Even Unto Death, Helper of the Fatherless, Hiding Place, One Who Inhabits Eternity, Refiner's Fire, Refuge, Refuge in Times of Trouble, Refuge for the Oppressed, Refuge from the Storm, Reproach of Men, Resting Place, Reward for the Righteous, Righteous Branch, River of Water in a Dry Place, Rock that is Higher than I, Rock of My Refuge, Rod, Rose of Sharon, Scepter of Israel, Star out of Jacob, My Stay, Stone which the Builders Refused, Strength of My Life, Strong Tower from the Enemy, Sun of Righteousness, and many more.

Three Questions to Answer As You Worship:

- Who Is He?
- How Great Is He?
- What Is His Wonderful Name?

Step 3 – Give Thanks

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving.”

Thanksgiving naturally follows confession and forgiveness! We did not put it in third place right next to worship lest we be tempted to think that worship and thanksgiving are the same thing. They are not. Thanksgiving is a distinct act of the will. It recognizes the hand of God and is thankful. It chooses to give God credit for what he has done, and what he has promised, while worship praises God for who He is.

In Everything Give Thanks

Thanks giving is to be as much a part of the believer's life as breathing. We are exhorted to live in thankfulness to God, and to exalt him with continual expressions of thanks regardless of our present circumstances. "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (2 Thessalonians 5:18)

In prayer we are exhorted to give thanks profusely for the goodness of the Lord, for all his benefits, for his mercies, for his faithfulness, for his steadfast love, for loads of blessings. Psalm 100 is an excellent guide for entering the presence of God. "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise: Be thankful unto him, and bless His name." Unthankfulness and silence curses God's name. It brings him shame.

Ingratitude

It was Israel's ingratitude of heart, the murmuring, the complaining, the grumbling, that brought on the wrath of God. It was not that God had not blessed. He had over and over again! It is that men soon forget the goodness of the Lord. We are quick to forget his answers to our prayers, His mercies in our troubles, His healings when we are sick, His forgiveness when we fail, His provisions in our need. Well did the psalmist groan in Psalm 107, *"O Give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good...Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"*

The Psalms are filled with expressions of thanks to God on every side. Oh, may our lives, our lips, be continual psalms of thanksgiving! The apostle Paul commands the same principle in the New Testament, regardless of the circumstances we are to be thankful and think on the good things the Lord has done. "Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep you hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Good Mental Health

Good mental health begins with a thankful attitude of heart. *"A merry heart does good like medicine...He that has a merry heart has a continual feast."* (Proverbs 15:13 / 17:22) Depression and discouragement are the inability to see the goodness of God around you. David frequently expressed his depression, *"I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of God in the land of the living."* (Psalm 27:13) The eyes of faith see the goodness of God even in the midst of adversity. God's purposes, plans, and provisions are always good! Remember, He is working it out. Be thankful while He works it out. (Romans 8:28 and Jeremiah 29:11)

Forget Not All His Benefits

Forgetfulness of God's multiplied blessings is sin. Forgetting or neglecting to give Him thanks is the sin of ingratitude - at least it is taking God for granted. D.L. Moody in commenting on Psalm 103 said, *"I can't remember all his benefits and blessings, but I dare not forget all of them either."* Thanksgiving is remembering God's good gifts and giving Him the credit due his name.

- Psalm 103:2-5 "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfies your mouth with good things; so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."
- Psalm 68:19 "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits..."
- James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

Thanksgiving Is a Sacrifice to God

Hebrews 13:15 points out that thanksgiving is a sacrifice to God. A sacrifice of our lips, that is to be offered up to God continually. Thanksgiving is not easy. It is tough to be thankful and express thanks from the heart for everything. Wouldn't prayer be wonderfully transformed if we would offer 10 sacrifices of thanksgiving for every request we make of God?

Practical Disciplines

1. Thank God for His Creation, your own body (Psalm 139:14)
2. Thank God for His provisions. For everything you have. List each thing for which you are thankful.
3. Thank God for people He has put into your life. Name them by name and what you are thankful for.
4. Thank God for little things. Start with the smallest things you can think of for which you are thankful. From there work toward the bigger things he has done. Never start with the big lest you despise the small. Do not despise the day of small things. (Zech. 4:10)
5. Thank God for hard things. "In everything give thanks...for this is the will of God..." Thank God for the trials and adversities that come to make us strong. They are what make us lean on Him. So thank Him!
6. Thank God for everything. Keep a notebook handy in which you write down your thanksgiving list. It helps!

Use these Psalms to guide your thanksgiving. Pray the Psalms. Mark them as "Thanksgiving" in your Bible: Psalm 103; 104; 105; 107; 111; 118; 124; 126; 136; 139

Step 4 – Confession of Sin

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

John, the beloved disciple, warns us against an attitude of innocence before a holy God. To say that we have nothing to confess to God is to call Him a liar, and to practice self-deception before our Maker. David says: *"Behold I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."* (Psalm 51:5) And Isaiah adds to his own unworthiness before a holy God when he says: *"All of our righteousnesses (that is, our best efforts) are as filthy rags."* (Isaiah 64:6) Most of us misread that passage and think that God means *"all of our unrighteousnesses."* But it is all our best effort at right living that are still as filthy rags. Even if we could keep all the law and stumble in only one small point we would be guilty of all.

Woe Is Me!

Isaiah, a man filled with the Spirit, a prophet of God, a man above reproach, is a good example of this truth. In Isaiah 6 he first sees the Lord in all his beauty, high and lifted up, and glorified. The sight was so awesome that the just and righteous Isaiah fell on His face before God with an acute awareness of his own sinful nature. He was not exaggerating. He was not bemoaning the sinfulness of other people. He saw himself in the light of God's holiness and cried *"Woe is me I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips."* (Isaiah 6:1-5)

We are not just to come into God's presence presumptuously, but humbly (2 Chronicles 7:14) contritely, with a sincere perspective on our own nature. We need a vision of ourselves, our true fallen nature, our minds which are unclean, and of which God knows every passing thought. (Psalm 139:1-5)

Bankruptcy

Until we recognize our own state of bankruptcy before a holy God we cannot truly lean upon His Righteousness, without which no man will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14) We would instead come into his presence as the Pharisee, proud, bragging of his kept laws, righteous deeds, his right to gain the Father's favor. We need to see ourselves as destitute, and totally depraved, without the righteousness of Christ. We have nothing of which to boast. We, are as the rich church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. *"Lukewarm...wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."*

A.W. Tozer says:

"We need to admit...the shallowness of our inner experience, the hollowness of our worship, the worldliness of our lives, our fleshly fallen nature that lives on, yet unjudged within us, uncrucified and unrepudiated, and the hyphenated sins of the human spirit, self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love, self-indulgence, and a host of other self-sins. They are not something we do, they are something we are..."

The Pursuit of God

REGARDING INIQUITY IN MY HEART

"If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." Psalm 66:18

To regard iniquity means to leave it alone, to tolerate it, to know it is there and do nothing about it. It is to hide it, to cover it by excuses, to consider it unimportant, to ignore its dangers.

God considers any iniquity to be an abomination. An abomination is a horrible disgusting thing. There are no "good guy" iniquities, no little white lies, no insignificant rebellions of the heart! God calls rebellion in any form "as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as idolatry." (1 Samuel 15:23) God considers sin as sin and all equally appalling to His holiness. Sin in our heart is to the Lord as festering sores, and maggots in his holy offerings – slimy, crawling, slithering, disgusting, maggots defiling the whole! (Isaiah 1:6)

Daniel was conscious of the subtle ways in which sin surrounds us and creeps into our thoughts, actions, and in-actions. In his exemplary prayer in Daniel 9 he identifies nine faces of sin.

WE HAVE ...

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Sinned | v 5 | Missed the mark, fallen short |
| 2. Committed iniquity | v 5 | Deliberate conscious sin |
| 3. Done wickedly | v 5 | Life-style habitual sin |
| 4. Rebelled | v 5/9 | Said no to God! |
| 5. Not hearkened | v 6 | Closed our ears, ignored |
| 6. Not obeyed voice | v 10 | Grieved the Holy Spirit |
| 7. Transgressed law | v 11 | Legal term, to know law and disobey |
| 8. Departed from God | v 11 | Backslidden, wandered away |
| 9. Made not prayer | v 13 | Sin of prayerlessness |

DEAL WITH SIN !

Jesus emphasized the need to deal with sin each time he spoke of prayer. In the Lord's prayer he deals heavily with the need to deal severely with sin. That is, in fact, the primary lesson of the Lord's Prayer. Immediately after citing it he pointed out the need to forgive as well as ask for forgiveness. In Matthew 5:23-26 Jesus further deals with sin in prayer by saying that when we come to God's altar with an offering we must first do something about broken relationships before we pray and offer praise!!! An attempt at reconciliation must be made before our prayers will be heard. I Peter 3:7 includes the marital relationship as being a hindering factor in prayer.

CONFESSION OF SIN

A man that truly enters into the presence of God cannot but help to see himself as unclean. Even the Scripture admits that *"all of our good deeds are as filthy rags."* So was the feeling of Isaiah before the throne in Isaiah 6, and of Daniel in chapter 9. The holiness of God cannot tolerate the presence of sin! We are exhorted to confess our sins to God (I John 1:8-9), and even admit our faults one to another (James 5:16) so as to pray effectively and fervently and be healed.

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR SIN

Conviction is seeing sin as exceedingly sinful.

Repentance is "Agreeing with God about my sin," and turning from it.

Confession is exposing it to God & asking Him to forgive and cleanse.

We cannot do penance for our sins, it would do no good. We cannot pay the penalty of our sins. The penalty or "wage of sin is death." Therefore God has provided a better way. We lay our sins on Jesus.

Isaiah 53 is a magnificent passage that describes the atonement of Jesus Christ for sins. Jesus paid it all on the cross. That is why he could say, "It is finished." Verse five says, *"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."* Verse six goes on, *"All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all."* Verse twelve goes even further, *"He was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."*

There is nothing more for me to do but lay my sins on Jesus. That is why the thief on the cross could be saved. He could not do penance. He could not make restitution for what he had done. He could not even prove his sincerity. He simply laid his sin on Jesus and said, "Have mercy on me." That is what Jesus came to do. *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

Lay your sins on Jesus - he is your sin-bearer. Then rejoice in what God says he has done with your sins. Confession is not commiserating or grieving over your fallen nature, your secret thoughts, or your sins of commission or omission, but asking and receiving forgiveness and the covering of the blood of Jesus. Do not leave the altar of confession without appropriating the provisions of the cross!. Be forgiven and give thanks.

What Happened To Our Sins?

1. They were paid in full - Romans 5:11 / Isaiah 53:6
2. They were pardoned - 1 John 1:9
3. They were laid on him - Isaiah 53:6
4. They were washed whiter than snow - Isaiah 1:18
5. They were covered - Psalm 32:1
6. They were cleansed by blood of Jesus - Hebrews 9:22/ 10:4
7. They were blotted out - Isaiah 44:22
8. They were removed as far as east from west - Psalm 103:12
9. They were cast in depths of sea - Micah 7:19
10. They were forever forgotten - Jeremiah 31:34

Read Psalm 51 and Psalm 139 as part of your confession of sin.

It is Well

My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul.

Step 5 – Clothe Yourself In His Armor

What is the first thing you do after taking a bath? Get dressed! I am so glad provision has been made for our nakedness! God commands us to “Put on”, as elect of God. We are commanded to “put on the Lord Jesus,” “Put on the new man,” and to “Put on the whole armor of God.” So put it on! That means dress in it. Reckon it to be so before the throne. Stand in Him complete.

Abraham believed God and it was “imputed” to him as righteousness. That word imputed means it was credited to his account. Though he was bankrupt himself, God applied it to his account because of his faith. Believe God and apply His provision for your nakedness.

The Old Testament book of Zechariah, chapter three contains a wonderful example of the need to put on, or to reckon ourselves clothed in the righteousness of God, and in the armor of the Lord. Joshua, the high priest, was standing before the Lord and Satan was at his right hand accusing him before the throne of God. Everything Satan brought against him was true except for one thing - God said, “I forgave him. I clothed him. Leave him alone!” Therefore God commanded the angel of the Lord to take off Joshua’s dirty tattered garments and give him a robe of pure white, a turban on his head, and a scepter in his hand. Then God looks at him and says, “Is not this the brand plucked out of the fire?”

There Are Two Parts to Reckoning:

1. Principle of Position - seeing yourself in heavenly places as God sees you.
2. Principle of Practice - exercising authority in Christ in heavenly places

Principle of Position

There is a “Principle of Position” that we all need to learn. It is the principle that though we all fall far short of the glory of God, God himself has made provision for us. His provision is that we can put on Christ. We wear his righteousness, his white robe, his crown, his authority. As God sees us in heaven he sees us through his perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ his Son. We are brands plucked out of the fire. Reckon it to be so! See yourself as God sees you... “*and you are complete in him.*”(Colossians 2:10)

“To Reckon” is to appropriate God’s invisible truth as our visible reality.

“To Believe” is to see the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith applies to our hearts the heavenly realities that God already sees.

- Put on the Lord Jesus Christ
- Put on His Righteousness
- Put on the Whole Armor of God

Principle of Practice – Using Your Authority

How do we exercise our God-given authority in Christ? How do we address the devil in our prayers? (We certainly don't pray to him.)

Weapons

God has clearly given us "Weapons of our Warfare" for the pulling down of strongholds. Our weapons (the word literally is "strategies") *are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself above the knowledge of God, and brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*" (2 Corinthians 10:4-6)

Words

The sword of the Spirit, is the Word of God. God's word is that which we use as our offense. It cuts, penetrates, convicts, declares, exposes, and casts out the enemies of God. Jesus said, *"All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth."* That is why whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven. (Matt. 16:19, 18:18) That authority is in his word, his ultimate authoritative command. We simply wield the sword. Just point it in the right direction.

Prayers

Our prayers, offered up to God in Jesus name, have powerful effects in spiritual realms.

- *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man has great effect."* – James 5:16
- *"Be strong" or be bold, boldfaced, courageous, aggressive, un-intimidated* - Eph 6:10
- *"A hand upon the throne"* - Exodus 17:16
- *"A hedge of protection"* - Ezekiel 22:30
- *"Come boldly to the throne of grace"* - Hebrews 4:16

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. <u>PUT ON</u> THE ARMOR OF GOD | Ephesians 6:11-18 |
| 2. <u>BE STRONG</u> IN THE LORD! | Ephesians 6:10 |
| 3. <u>BIND</u> THE ENEMY | Matthew 18:18-20 |
| 4. <u>RESIST</u> THE DEVIL | James 4:7 |
| 5. <u>CLAIM</u> THE BLOOD | Revelation 12:11 |
| 6. <u>LOOSE</u> THE CAPTIVES | Luke 4:18 |
| 7. <u>PULL DOWN</u> STRONGHOLDS | II Corinthians. 10:3-5 |
| 8. <u>PUT A HEDGE</u> OF PROTECTION | Ezekiel 22:30 |
| 9. <u>COMMAND</u> HIM TO LEAVE | Matthew 10:1 |
| 10. <u>REBUKE</u> HIM IN JESUS | Matthew 17:18 |

It is only when we stand in our own righteousness that we should be afraid to stand before the enemy, for our righteousnesses are as "filthy rags" but the righteousness of Christ is called the armor of God.

Who I Am In Christ

Biblical Truths to “Practice Believing”

I AM GOD’S...

- possession Genesis 17:8/ 1Cor 6:20
- child John 1:12
- workmanship Ephesians 2:10
- friend James 2:23
- temple 1 Corinthians 3:16/ 6:16
- vessel 2 Timothy 2:2
- co-laborer 1 Timothy 5:18
- witness Acts 1:8
- soldier 2 Timothy 2:3
- ambassador 2 Corinthians 5:20
- building 1 Corinthians 3:9
- husbandry 1 Corinthians 3:9
- minister/instrument Acts 26:16 / 1 Tim 4:6
- chosen Ephesians 1:4
- beloved Romans 1:7/ 2 Thess 2:13
- precious jewel Malachi 3:17
- heritage 1 Peter 5:3

I HAVE BEEN...

- redeemed by the blood Rev 5:9
- set free from sin /condemnation Rom 8:1-2
- set free from Satan’s control Col 1:13
- set free from Satan’s kingdom Eph 2
- chosen before foundation of world Eph 1:4
- predestined to be like Jesus Eph 1:11
- forgiven of all my trespasses Col 2:13
- washed in the blood of the Lamb Rev 1:5
- given a sound mind 2 Timothy 1:7
- given the Holy Spirit 2 Corinthians 1:22
- adopted into God’s family Romans 8:15
- justified freely by his grace Romans 3:24
- given all things pertaining to life 2 Pet 1:3
- given great and precious promises 2 Pet 1:4
- given ministry of reconciliation 2 Cor 1:22
- authority over the power of enemy Lk 10:19
- access to God Eph 3:12
- been given wisdom Eph 1:8

I AM...

- complete in him Colossians 2:10
- free forever from sin’s power Romans 6:14
- sanctified 1 Corinthians 6:11
- meet for the Master’s use 2 Timothy 2:21
- loved eternally 1 Peter 1:5
- eternally kept in the palm of his hand
- kept from falling Jude 1:24
- kept by the power of God 1 Peter 1:5
- not condemned Romans 8:1-2
- on my way to heaven John 14:6
- quickened by his mighty power Eph 2:1

- seated in heavenly places Eph 1:3
- the head and not the tail Deut 28:13
- light in the darkness Matthew 5:14
- candle in a dark place Matthew 5:15
- city set on a hill Matthew 5:14
- salt of the earth Matthew 5:13
- his sheep Ps 23 / Psalms 100:3/ John 10:14
- a citizen of heaven 1 Peter 2:11
- hidden with Christ in God Psalms 32:7
- protected from the evil one 1 John 5:18
- kept by the power of God 1 Peter 1:5
- secure in Christ Jn 10:28-29
- set upon a Rock Psalms 40:2
- more-than-a-conqueror Romans 8:37
- a victor 1 John 5:4
- healed by his strips Is 53:6
- covered by the blood of Jesus Heb 10:13
- sheltered under his wing Psalms 91:4
- hidden in the secret place Ps 91:1

I HAVE...

- access to the Father Romans 5:2
- a home in heaven waiting for me Jn 14:1-2
- all things in Christ 2 Corinthians 5:17
- a living hope 1 Peter 1:3
- an anchor to my soul Hebrews 6:19
- a hope that is sure and steadfast Heb 6:19
- authority to tread on serpents Luke 10:19
- power to witness Acts 1:8
- the tongue of the learned Isaiah 50:4
- the mind of Christ 1 Corinthians 2:16
- boldness and access Hebrews 10:19
- peace with God Romans 5:1
- faith as a grain of mustard seed Luke 17:6

I CAN...

- do all things through Christ Phil 4:13
- find mercy and grace to help Heb 4:16
- come boldly to the throne of grace Heb 4:16
- quench all the fiery darts Eph 6:16
- tread on the serpent Luke 10:19
- declare liberty to captives Isaiah 61:1
- pray always and everywhere Luke 21:36
- chase a thousand Joshua 23:10
- defeat the enemy Romans 16:20

I CANNOT...

- be separated from God’s love Rom 8:35-39
- be lost John 10:28
- be moved Psalms 16:8
- taken out of the Father’s hand John 10:29

Step 6 – Cast Your Burdens

Ps. 55:22 Cast your burden on the Lord...He shall sustain you.

Phil. 4:6 In everything...let your requests be made known unto God.

I Pet.5:7 Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Job 1:5 Job rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings for all of them.

Unpacked Baggage

We cannot properly intercede for others until we have cleared away the baggage of personal concerns, needs, and cares. We must find a resting place where we can lay down our burdens, in order to bear other's burdens in prayer. Hearts that are "overloaded" with care will be distracted in prayer and made ineffective in their intercession.

In Luke 21:34, Jesus warned his disciples to beware of the danger of three distracting pitfalls:

1. Over-abundance (surfeiting, over-spending, over-charging, too many possessions)
2. Over-indulgence (drunkenness, lover of pleasures, over-eating, over-playing)
3. Over-load (cares, burdens, worries, fears of this life)

Take Your Burden To The Lord

The most deceptive and innocent looking is the "overload...with cares of this life." We cannot escape the cares of normal living, but we can UNLOAD the OVERLOAD. Jesus concludes the issue in verse 36 by saying, "Therefore watch and pray always..."

Leave It There!

The solution to overloaded cares is to pray. That means to bring those excess burdens, cares, concerns, problems, worries, fears, anxieties, and troubles TO THE LORD and leave them there! Too often we take these concerns to the Lord, and walk away just as burdened as before we prayed. There is no "leaving it there."

Cast, Roll, Dump It!

David used an interesting word for "leaving it there." "Cast thy burden on the Lord."

Psalms 55:22 The word "CAST" is the key. It literally means... ROLL... DUMP...

UNLOAD... as one who is carrying a backpack of heavy equipment allows it to slide from his shoulders to another who is stronger, more able to carry the load.

You cannot carry your own burdens and the burdens of others!

Burdens are lifted as we roll them onto the Lord

Practical Disciplines

Pray for yourself:

- Your troubles
- Your aches & pains
- Your faith & faithfulness
- Your courage to witness
- Your heart's secret goals
- Your needs, provisions
- Your finances, funds
- Your enemies

Pray for your Future

- Your plans
- Your goals
- Your ministries
- Your vision

Pray for your family

- Each member by name and need
- Salvation of children
- Spouse needs
- Spiritual growth & love of all in family
- Health and safety
- Protection from evil & temptation

Pray for your faults

- Your struggles
- Your worries
- Your temptations
- Your wants & wishes
- Your heartaches
- Your failures

SONGS:

Burdens Are Lifted At Calvary / Jesus Knows Just What I Need / No One Understands
Like Jesus / What a Friend We Have in Jesus / Take Your Burden to the Lord and Leave
It There / I Cast All My Cares Upon You.

Cast your burden on the Lord...He shall sustain you. – Ps. 55:22

Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. – 1 Pet.5:7

Now Go To The Workbook!

We have provided you with a Workbook to accompany these lessons. You will find it a wonderful help as you begin the process of personal discipline of prolonged prayer. This will be especially helpful in doing a Personal Prayer Retreat in which you have one or two days to carefully work through each step.