

*WitnessKit Bible Study:
Bible Doctrines As a
System of Thought*

Class 11: Prayer

Jeremiah 32:17, 37b-41

Jeremiah prayed: “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee.”

The LORD answered: “I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety. And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and for the good of their children after them.

Jeremiah 32:17, 37b-41

And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good;

and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.

And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.”

God Is One

Deuteronomy 6: 4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. (NKJV)

God Answers Prayer!

Israel's existence as a nation is an example—God answered Jeremiah's prayer. Jeremiah trusted God's promise enough to purchase land for the future, even with Babylonian conquest approaching. God still answers prayer.

Prayer as a life discipline

- The BEST study course in how to pray is *Disciples Prayer Life, Walking in Fellowship with God* by T. W. Hunt and Catherine Walker, Lifeway Press, Nashville Tennessee 1997. Available at
- <http://www.lifeway.com/Keyword/disciple+s+prayer+life>
- In the meantime, we can use the Bible to consider the discipline of prayer for spiritual growth and fellowship with God and accomplishing His agenda in this world.

Prayer is Personal

- All of us have a history in this spiritual discipline. We either have prayed or not. When we have prayed, we have prayed specifically or not. When we have prayed, we either have received answers or not. When we are concerned about people and events around us, we either worry or pray or both. The more concerned we are about things around us, the more our emotions are involved when we pray.
- And the more disappointed we are when prayers are answered “No.”

God blessed me

With a Grandmother who received vivid answers to her prayers. In the movie, *Ben Hur* a famous line is from the lifeboat scene is “I keep you alive to serve this ship.” In the last 9 years of my Grandmother’s life, in the middle of severe and miserable health problems, God “kept my Grandmother alive to pray.” He even let her know, during the last month of her life, that she would die before my birthday, so she sent my birthday letter early with a little note about that.

But for me,

- Prayer has never been so easy.
- I am extremely distressed by suffering in this world. I want this world to be more like heaven. I want answers and I want them NOW.
- Even though we are supposed to hate evil and to love God, hating evil should not interfere with our prayer life. But for me, it does. There is so much OF IT.
- I am so grateful Jesus carried that entire load on the cross and died with it, so there CAN BE

Victory

- Victory over evil and suffering and death.
- But I want it right NOW, for everybody!
And I don't pray very well because of that attitude. So for a grouchy praying person to try to write this set of slides is not so easy.

Lifelong learning in prayer

College came on the heels of the worst prayer challenge of my life. It rattled my faith at a time when I needed my faith to be strong. During those years, my mother went through a series of terrible losses. Her best friend from college passed away from cancer. Her best friend at church died of cancer. Her best friend locally was in a devastating car wreck, and lingered in intensive care for several days, and then died. Her mother, my grandmother, passed away due to stroke and heart attack.

The three deaths from illness

Were preceded by severe suffering, and that suffering made me angry and sad. But it also made me more accepting of the deaths.

- The car wreck was just senseless.
- The time in intensive care was full of hope, with time to pray for recovery.
- While she was in intensive care, I prayed fervently for her recovery, full of perfect confidence that God would answer.

But there was a problem the doctors failed to find in time to correct.

And she died.

I could not see any reason for such a devastating outcome.

- It was not my level of faith that was the problem in the failure to have the prayer answered.
- I was totally convinced that she would recover—that God was able to make her well, and that it was the right thing for Him to do, so of course He would.
- Yet she died.

The aftermath of that loss was negative in every way I could see.

Her daughter and husband were left without a mother and wife at a time when they needed her.

My mother was left without her best friend, and really without her whole group of best friends.

People would quote Bible verses to me that were supposed to comfort, yet they did not comfort, because I could not make sense of the situation and the role of prayer.

The aftermath of that loss was negative in every way I could see.

Through that situation, I learned emphatically that prayer does NOT work like a vending machine—not even in matters of life and death.

Prayer is not a matter of putting the right coins in the machine and getting the answer you choose.

Even following the instructions in Bible verses as to HOW to pray does not ensure the answer you ask for. (Although it does give you clear reason to pray in faith.)

God is not a machine.

Of course, only God knows what the alternatives were, should He have answered that prayer of mine. Only God sees all the potential outcomes of every event. Only God can optimize for eternity during devastating events.

For my prayer not to be answered did not shake my confidence in God, but it did shake my confidence in myself as someone able to pray. It created a nagging question of WHY was my prayer answered “No?”

Why?

- Was God pleased with my prayer and my faith that He would answer? Had I failed Him in some way? Did I misunderstand prayer? What about His permissive will and His WILL? Were they the same thing? I had seen prayers answered—so why not this time?
- I am sure God was pleased. It was right for me to pray as I did. Yet it was also necessary that I not allow His negative answer to shake my ultimate faith in His goodness.

To demand that prayer work like a vending machine

is to deny God's wisdom in answering the best way.

(The exception is specific prayer promises. God keeps His promises. When we pray in repentance and faith to receive His mercy on His terms, He answers yes.)

We also do need to pray specifically so that we have concrete answers to abstract principles. We have too many concerns that need His help NOT to pray about them.

Was I Supposed to Pray about This?

Philippians 4:6 tells us to pray about everything.

1Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to pray without ceasing.

EVERYTHING that matters to us matters to God.

As we walk with Him and receive His answers to prayer, we realize that He truly is with us.

The only way to stay in fellowship with Him is to lift our thoughts to Him in prayer moment by moment.

What ARE Proper Subjects for Prayer?

According to Mark 11:24, John 14:13-14 and John 15:7, and Matthew 18:19, proper subjects for prayer include

- all things that you can believe God for,
- anything you ask for in Jesus' name,
- anything you agree upon with another person before God.
- So we can and should pray about anything of concern to us.

Does Prayer Work?

The Bible is full of examples of prayers that worked in history. Prayer works because of

- God's good character.
- God's mighty power.
- God's wisdom for the future.
- God's infinite mercy and love.
- God's desire that no one should perish.

Prayer is the awesome privilege of talking to God—and knowing that He listens.

We can actualize

3 Prayer Questions

The miracle of prayer by practicing consistency with the answers to these questions:

1. Does prayer work?
2. How do we pray?
3. How do we remove barriers to answered prayer?

Does prayer work?

Persevere to find out!

Luke 18:1-8 God is GOOD. Even an unrighteous judge will give a good answer if pestered long enough. God is a RIGHTEOUS Judge, who WANTS to give a good answer. So KEEP on praying!

- Jesus said faith will be hard to find by the time He returns.
- I believe that is because persecution will be so severe, and lawlessness so severe, that love and faith will be weakened—as described in the Scriptures.

Does prayer work?

But we can choose NOT to cave in to either persecution or lawlessness. We can keep our eyes on Jesus and on eternity. Eternity is just around the corner.

- Luke 18:9-14 We do have to face our own sins in honesty and humility.
- Hebrews 11:6 We also must believe that God exists and that He wants to reward those who diligently seek Him.

Does prayer work?

- Even if we are doing everything right—getting all the requirements met—one more criterion is required for a positive answer to prayer.
- 1 John 5:14-15 *“If we ask according to His will, He hears us and answers yes.”*
- I used to wonder if that was a Biblical loophole to make prayer believable when it was mostly chance outcomes, physical law, and human decisions at work. But my Grandmother DID die of a massive heart attack just before my birthday. She was so close to God in her prayer life, even her death reinforced faith.

Does prayer work?

The requirement to pray according to His will goes back to God's character and wisdom. He has a gigantic optimization problem when answering us. He has a trillion variables to consider of causes and effects from any particular outcome. If He says no, He has good reason—eternally good reason.

He is the righteous judge who WANTS to answer our prayers. He only says no for important reasons.

Does prayer work?

- What requirement for prayer is found in Psalm 22:24?
- ²⁴ For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard. (NKJV)
- The requirement is to cry to Him for help when in need. You cannot ignore Him and call that a prayer.

Does prayer work? God sees the heart, so you should be direct.

Elements of Asaph's prayer in Psalm 79: 8-13 are

- Honesty and directness regarding the problems he was facing,
- a desire for God's glory to be seen through the answer to prayer,
- a request to be forgiven of sins,
- a cry for help,
- a cry for God to act against evil, and
- a determination to tell the faith to the following generations.

Does prayer work?

God speaks about prayer in Psalm 81:6-14.

- He had answered the people repeatedly when they cried to Him for help in the past.
- They needed to LISTEN to Him.
- They needed to avoid entanglements with foreign gods.
- They needed to obey Him, and walk in His ways.
- He would quickly solve their problems again.

Does prayer work? The Bible says YES!

James 5:13-18

When suffering, pray!

When ill, ask for prayer from others.

God answers prayer.

Pray for one another.

The effective prayer of a righteous person can accomplish much.

Elijah was a person like us, and God answered his prayers in amazing ways.

Does prayer work?

- Psalm 17—What are some of the things King David prays for in this Psalm?
- He asks for God's judgment because he has purposed to do what is right. He asks for protection from enemies—for God to confront them. He asks for God to hear his prayers.
- What are some of the things he is thankful for in this Psalm?
- Passing God's tests, being kept from violence, & being enabled to stay true to God.

Does prayer work?

Does David ask for a miracle in this Psalm?

- Yes—“Wondrously show Thy loving kindness O Savior of those who take refuge at Thy right hand!”
- What is the most important thing to King David in this Psalm?
- **Eternal life!**
- **He says it is more important than family.**

We can actualize

3 Prayer Questions

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2. **How do we pray?**
3. How do we remove barriers to answered prayer?

How do we pray?

Jesus' directions about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:5-15:

- No hypocrisy allowed.
- Quieter is better.
- Avoid meaningless repetition—get to the point. This is real.
- Pray to God as Father, with a desire to honor His name.

How do we pray?

- Pray for His kingdom to come and for His good and perfect will to be done on earth as in heaven. (I think of that as praying for Him to optimize situations for people's eternity.)
- Ask for what you need.
- Ask for forgiveness of your own sins, while forgiving those who have wronged you.
- Ask for guidance,

How do we pray?

- and for protection from temptation and testing,
- and for deliverance from evil.
- Admit that the eternal Kingdom belongs to God, as well as the power and MORAL authority and glory due to His perfection.
 - ▣ If there are sins you need to repent of but don't want to, ask Him to help you want to do what is right.

How do we pray?

- Some religious traditions use written prayers, and many use the Lord's Prayer as a way of praying together as a group.
- That is fine as a starting point, but if your prayer life stops there, your prayer life needs to expand. Each line of the Lord's Prayer is a topic for specific prayer. Treat the prayer as a topical outline and personalize it.
- One of the commands of Scripture is to “Pray without ceasing.” That demands conversational prayer in the thought life.

How do we pray?

- Matthew 7:7-11 Ask and it shall be given to you; Seek and you shall find; knock and the door shall be opened to you—because God is a good Father who wants to give good things to His children.
- These verb tenses are progressive, so we should ask and keep asking, seek, and keep seeking, knock and keep knocking.
- God answers yes, no, and wait...and it is fine to keep asking while you wait.

How do we pray?

- Our attitude while we pray matters. It is fine to keep asking, as long as we keep our attitude within proper bounds. Prayers should be faith-filled requests—not whines. If someone really feels like whining or having some other improper attitude, ask God for help with the attitude and then pray about the issue. The fact that God wants us to pray without ceasing means HE LOVES US. He wants to spend time with us. Is that not amazing?

We can actualize

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How do we remove barriers to answered prayer?

Removing
the three
barriers

The Three Barriers:

1. **Un-repented sin**
2. Un-forgiveness toward others
3. **Lack of faith.**

Removing Un-repentened Sin

Psalm 66:18—“If I regard wickedness in my heart, the LORD will not hear me.”

The first barrier that must be removed in order to pray effectively is the sin barrier.

We studied how to remove that barrier under the topic of Repentance. (Class 9)

When you receive the new life available through Christ, you go through the steps of repentance of sins and receiving forgiveness. At that point, all prior sins are forgiven.

Temptation is not sin.

- Temptations will still happen.
- The Holy Spirit in your life will help you resist temptation successfully.
- But because you are human, at times you will do something that is less than loving God and loving people. You will react in a selfish way or take some other action that you will wish you had not done. You will miss the mark. Missing the mark is sin.
- You will need God's help to take away that sin.

Removing Un-repentent Sin

- In general you still sin—although not so severely as before, because the Holy Spirit gives power to avoid sin. The sins prior to salvation are forgiven.
- From the perspective of heaven, God already sees all our sins as forgiven in the cross of Christ—but in the here and now, we have to keep repenting and confessing and seeking forgiveness. Ephesians chapter 1 and 1 John chapter 1, read together, give us a glimpse of His perspective.

Removing Un-repentent Sin

- The entire letter of 1 John is helpful for this topic. God requires perfection for fellowship with Him, and gives us perfection when we repent and confess to Him. God will not allow His child to continue in a lifestyle of sin—God disciplines His children and demands right behavior. He also graciously provides a way to do the right thing.
- This is important for people who have lived wrongly in the past to understand. If they seek God, He will make a way for them to do the right thing.

Removing Un-repentred Sin

- Jesus described this as “washing our feet.” At the Last Supper, Jesus told the Apostle Peter that he already was clean, but he needed his feet washed.
- Daily new sins need to be repented each day as part of one’s regular spiritual routine. God sees them as forgiven, but fellowship with Him requires confession on a daily basis.
- Jesus Christ included this concept in the Lord’s Prayer—“Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”

Removing Un-repentent Sin

Bill Bright published a “Transferable Concept” (TransferableConcepts.org) called “spiritual breathing,” meaning that as soon as a person realizes a sin has been committed, even just in the thoughts, he immediately confesses it silently to God, and receives His forgiveness.

This is like breathing out the dirty air and breathing in the fresh air.

Sins are much easier to get rid of and much less likely to do damage when approached this way.

Removing Un-repented Sin

1 John chapter 1 refreshes our minds in these concepts. If we follow the procedure of spiritual breathing, we have ongoing fellowship with God, and fellowship with each other.

It is “dynamic perfection” rather than static perfection. If you have to confess some thought sin every few minutes, go right ahead. God is listening and He delights in preparing us for fellowship with Him.

Removing Un-repentent Sin

Of course, real repentance requires several things.

You have to understand God's principles, so that you know when you are in the wrong. It is possible to mess up in either direction—by thinking something is wrong when it is not wrong, or by thinking something is fine when it is not.

The Bible is a great help for sorting out real wrongs from things that are not wrong.

Removing Un-repentent Sin

I John 3: 19-24 is a great help when you are not sure what is the right answer.

19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. **20** For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. **21** Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

Removing Un-repented Sin

I John 3: ²² And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

²³ And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

²⁴ Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. 1 John 3:19-24 (NKJV)

Removing Un-repentent Sin

You have to be sorry for the wrongs, and tell God so in prayer, asking His forgiveness.

If the wrong has caused problems to others, you have to do what you can to make it right.

If you cannot do anything to make it right, you have to pray for those individuals, and ask God to fix the problem.

In this matter, God sees the heart. He knows the entire situation.

He is also able to guide you, if you seek His guidance.

Removing Un-repentent Sin

God deals with us as a Good Father deals with His children. He sets standards that are reasonable. He gives us the power to meet His requirements. He helps us when we fail to measure up. He sees our hearts and is PLEASED when we are seeking Him with all our hearts.

Because He knows us better than we even know ourselves, He can teach us the right path for our lives.

Purpose

- The purpose for that process is to GET RID OF THE SIN, to clear it out of the way,
- SO YOU CAN PRAY EFFECTIVELY!
- So repentance and seeking forgiveness is the beginning of effective prayer.

Because so much of this

Takes place in the heart,

- Others may not be able to understand how serious you are about these matters.
- God does understand. God is a Father who approves of His children who are seeking Him with all their hearts.
- God is pleased with His good children. God delights in making us good.

How do we remove barriers to answered prayer?

Removing
the three
barriers

The Three Barriers:

1. **Un-repented sin**
2. **Un-forgiveness toward others**
3. **Lack of faith.**

Removing Un-forgiveness toward others

The second barrier is un-forgiveness toward others, which we also must deal with on a daily basis. Ephesians 4:26 suggests dealing with the issue of anger or grudges before the sun goes down.

We dealt with this issue in great detail in Class 9 on forgiveness, so we will not repeat that material here. If the idea is new to you, it is worth review and practice until you gain it as a habit.

Removing Un-forgiveness toward others

- This is the issue that often trips up the people who want the very most to be good. The people who “Hunger and thirst for righteousness,” may have difficulty forgiving others who don’t.
- So the matter of forgiving others is a gateway to effective prayer, and worth every ounce of suffering involved in turning loose of wrongs.
- It also makes possible intercession for the one who did the wrong action.

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From the side of Heaven

God's Grace is the central concept of the Bible. From the side of earth, our Faith is the central issue. Faith is necessary...

The Centrality of Faith

Faith is necessary for salvation—trusting in the LORD, entrusting one's soul to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. Trusting in the payment for sin that Jesus made in our place—dying for us so we won't have to die eternally.

One question is whether Law can save. The answer is complicated, yet clear. Luke 10:25-28 says

The Centrality of Faith

²⁵ And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading *of it?*" ²⁷ So he answered and said, "*'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'*" ²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." Luke 10:25-28 (NKJV)

The Centrality of Faith

- Then Jesus tells him about the man who fell among thieves, and the religious people who passed him by. The Samaritan saw him and took action to help. Through this, Jesus showed that **everyone** is our neighbor.
- So **nobody** can keep this law perfectly, even if they really want to do so. It would require infinite love on our part.
- Only God has infinite love. We need His righteousness. We need His love in our hearts.

So the Righteousness that Comes by Faith

Is necessary for salvation. God wants us to obey His rules, especially out of love for Him and others. We still need faith to please Him.

It takes faith to allow Jesus Christ to take sins away.

It takes faith to trust Him.

It even takes faith to pursue the truth about Who He is.

It also takes faith to pray effectively.

Removing Lack of Faith

The third barrier that hinders prayer is unbelief—which is a very serious sin in God’s sight. It is really important to Him that we believe Him.

In my prayer situation regarding the friend in the car wreck when I was in high school, lack of faith was not the problem for unanswered prayer. But it could have been—and unanswered prayer challenged my faith.

Removing Lack of Faith

Faith includes believing He is able to help in our times of need. Faith includes believing that He wants to help, in His infinite goodness—that He ALWAYS has our best interest at heart.

Faith especially means believing in His promises, and often His Holy Spirit will bring one of His promises to mind during our times of need. Cling to those promises.

Pray those promises back to Him with thankfulness.

Removing Lack of Faith

Hebrews 3:13 tells us to act if we sense discouragement in others. We are to encourage one another, and to avoid hardening our hearts, and to try to help others not to harden their hearts. We are supposed to hold fast to our faith and we are supposed to pay attention to what God says and believe it.

Verses 14 and 15 tell us what to do if we find discouragement in ourselves. We must stand firm in our faith, and pay attention to what God says, and never harden our hearts.

Removing Lack of Faith

During earlier homework, we made a chart of things God delights in and things God detests. One of the difficulties of unbelief is a sense that “God might not be pleased with me.”

That chart is a good test of the things that please God—and if your life is filled with the things that please Him, you can be confident that He wants to hear your prayers.

If it is filled with column 2, you know where to start repenting.

Removing Lack of Faith

God Delights in These Things

Proverbs 11:1, A just standard or weight. Fair practices.

Proverbs 11:20, The blameless in their walk.

Proverbs 15:8, The prayer of the upright

Proverbs 12:22, Those who deal faithfully

God Detests These Things.

Proverbs 11:1, A false balance

Proverbs 11:20, The perverse in their heart

Proverbs 15:8, The sacrifice of the wicked

Proverbs 12:22, Lying lips

Removing Lack of Faith

God Delights in These Things

Psalm 16:3, The majestic saints in the earth.

Proverbs 8:30-31, His creation and people

Luke 12:32, Giving us the kingdom.

God Detests These Things.

Proverbs 6:16-19 haughty eyes,
a lying tongue,
hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that run rapidly to evil,
a false witness who utters lies,
and one who spreads strife among brothers.

Removing Lack of Faith

God Delights in These Things

Hosea 6:6, loyalty and the knowledge of God.

Hebrews 11:6, faith, seeking Him diligently

Psalms 37:23 the steps of a righteous man, the way or path he takes

God Detests These Things.

Psalms 5:1-7 wickedness, evil,

the boastful,

those who do iniquity or lawlessness,

those who speak falsehood,

those who practice bloodshed and deceit,

Removing Lack of Faith

God Delights in These Things

Psalm 15:1-5 The one who
walks with integrity
The one who works
righteousness,
who speaks truth in his heart,
One who despises a
reprobate,
one who honors those who
fear the LORD
One who swears to his own
hurt without changing

God Detests These Things.

one who slanders,
one who does evil to a
neighbor,
one who takes up a
reproach against a
friend,
one who takes interest in
a bribe,

Removing Lack of Faith

God Delights in These Things

Isaiah 62:1-4, restored
Zion

Comment

(note that there is a mis-translation in the next few verses. The context is restoration of custody of children after divorce—“your sons will live with you.” Symbolically the captivity of Zion is compared to the pain of divorce, and the restoration of Zion to the joy of the restoration of a marriage and restored custody of children.)

Removing Lack of Faith

God loves you. He is a GOOD Parent who wants to give good things to His children.

Matthew 7:7-11 demands stubborn praying. The verbs in this passage are progressive tenses, meaning that we are to ask and keep on asking, to knock and keep on knocking, to seek and keep on seeking.

Luke 11:5-10 places those directions under the topic of PERSISTENCE.

Removing Lack of Faith

Our suffering for Christ's Name produces GLORY, according to Romans 8:18 and 2 Corinthians 4:17,—an eternal weight of glory beyond earthly comparison.

We cannot see that glory.

Therefore, persecution can cause discouragement.

It is a privilege to experience persecution, and there is a special fellowship of Jesus' sufferings, according to Philippians 3:8-14.

Removing Lack of Faith

This passage recommends these attitudes for such a time:

- Counting everything else as insignificant compared to knowing Jesus Christ,
- trusting His righteousness,
- humbly recognizing that you are not perfect yet, but pressing on toward the goal of the upward call of Christ.

Removing Lack of Faith

Suffering for His sake DOES NOT mean He does not love us, according to Romans 8:26-39. Nothing can separate us from His love.

The Apostle Paul experienced much persecution for the sake of the Gospel. He was human, and he describes some of his emotional response in 1 Corinthians 2:3 and 2 Corinthians 1:8-11. How does he describe himself?

Weakness, fear, trembling, burdened excessively beyond his strength, despairing even of life, with no trust in himself, but rather in God,

Removing Lack of Faith

Paul found purpose in his suffering, according to 2 Corinthians 1:1-7—the comfort he received from God was transferable to others in need of comfort.

Suffering can produce a sense of personal inadequacy, yet God wants us to be confident in our prayer life and witness. 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 says our adequacy is entirely from God. He made us adequate as His servants, so that we can be bold in our speech, and He is transforming us into His glory.

Removing Lack of Faith

2 Corinthians 4:7 says we have His treasure in earthen vessels—with human weaknesses—so that the greatness of power is obviously from God.

What is seen and unseen: Faith depends upon what is unseen—so it is difficult.

God expects us to love truth and to search for truth. Searching for truth leads us to Him—even though we cannot see Him.

Removing Lack of Faith

When God gives us enough light of truth to know we can trust Him, we should choose to do so. Then we begin to walk daily with Him.

“We walk by faith and not by sight.” To be effective we have to keep trusting God when we cannot see the answers. This is especially true for our prayer life.

Removing Lack of Faith

- Hebrews 11:1-3 says faith is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
- Faith is substance—that means in God’ sight our faith is REAL. It is like an underlying bedrock stratum that He can build upon. It matters.
- If nobody else encourages us to have faith, we should encourage ourselves.

Removing Lack of Faith

- Ecclesiastes 8:17 and 11:5 tell us we don't know what God is doing behind the scenes—unless He tells us.
- So it is wrong to assume He is NOT actively working to help us behind the scenes.
- We cannot see what He is doing, but faith depends on His good character rather than what we can see. Faith assumes God is acting for our good.

Removing Lack of Faith

Deuteronomy 29:29 and 30:19-20 tell us the hidden things belong to God. The truth He has given us in His word belongs to us and to our children forever.

We express faith by choosing life and blessing—by loving our God, by obeying His words and holding fast to Him.

He is worthy of our love because of His perfect goodness. This most basic choice is the starting point—we choose Him.

Removing Lack of Faith

He chooses us. He loves us. We love Him. The right God is the true and living God of the Bible—the Creator of all things who loves us and paid the price to take away our sins.

In Job 35:14 Elihu told Job the real situation when Job was lamenting—‘If only I could be able to plead my case before God!’ Elihu said “YOUR CASE IS before Him. You must wait for Him.”

God is infinite, so He is able to handle our individual case right now. We don't have to wait to get His attention—we already have His attention.

Removing Lack of Faith

According to Colossians 2:2-3 we have *wealth in the form of a true knowledge of God's mystery—that is Christ Himself—because in Christ are hidden ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* If we have Christ, we have access to all those treasures.

Philippians 2:13 tells us one of the revealed things God is doing behind the scenes. God is at work in you both **to will** and **to work** for His good pleasure. He is working behind the scenes in each individual.

Removing Lack of Faith

When we experience persecution, is God still doing this revealed thing in us and in other people? *Yes.*

Do we have to see what God is doing in this hidden realm in order to trust Him? *No. We can trust without seeing. We can choose to trust.*

According to Ephesians 1:18-20, what kind of power does God hold and use behind the scenes? *The same power that He used to raise Christ from the dead—and that power extends for each of us from the present to eternity.*

Removing Lack of Faith

Special promises go with persecution: Faith means clinging to God's promises, and reminding yourself of His promises during prayer.

Isaiah 54:11-17 tells us that persecution DOES NOT come from God. If anyone fiercely assails us, it is NOT from God.

Removing Lack of Faith

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and 5:1-7 give us reasons not to lose heart.

- God renews our inner person daily,
- and our troubles are temporary,
- yet they are producing an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison with earthly things.

What are we supposed to look at to avoid losing heart? *The unseen eternal things.*

Removing Lack of Faith

According to Isaiah 55:6-11, our ways and the things we can see cannot compare to God's ways.

His ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours—as much different as the heavens are higher than the earth—and at current estimate, that is about 13 billion light years.

What does God do behind the scenes if we are brave enough to send out His word? *He will make His word fruitful, accomplishing His good wishes. He will give it success.*

Removing Lack of Faith

Isaiah 59:14-21 describes a time when righteous people are systematically persecuted.

It says God acts behind the scenes.

- He puts on His armor for vengeance
- and to produce proper fear of Him in people,
- and He sends His Redeemer to those willing to turn away from transgression.

Removing Lack of Faith

For the families of those who are persecuted it promises

- His Holy Spirit and His words will remain upon the one persecuted
 - ▣ and upon his or her children
 - and grandchildren,
 - from now and forever.

Removing Lack of Faith

According to 1 Peter 4:12-19 we have reason for feeling blessed while experiencing persecution. We are sharing in the suffering of Christ, and His Spirit of glory and of God will rest upon us. Therefore, we are to entrust our souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Matthew 5:10-12 mentions all these kinds of persecution—Insults, persecutions, false accusation of all kinds—so God notices it all, from the least to the worst forms.

One of the troubling things about the world

Is the ongoing persecution that seems to be getting worse and worse.

We have seen horrendous outbreaks of persecution from the start of the twentieth century and the Armenian genocide in Turkey, to the Holocaust, to the grinding persecution of religious minorities in the Communist world, to the ongoing persecution of Christians and Jews in the Muslim world today.

Psalm 102—written for people of the future at that time—vs. 18

¹ A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before the LORD. Hear my prayer, O LORD, And let my cry come to You. ² Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; Incline Your ear to me; In the day that I call, answer me speedily. ³ For my days are consumed like smoke, And my bones are burned like a hearth.

The person praying describes himself as overwhelmed by his troubles, and facing being his bones being burned like a hearth. Lamentations 5:10 describes starvation “Our skin has become as hot as an oven because of the burning heat of famine.”

Psalm 102

⁴ My heart is stricken and withered like grass, So that I forget to eat my bread.
⁵ Because of the sound of my groaning My bones cling to my skin. ⁶ I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert. ⁷ I lie awake, And am like a sparrow alone on the housetop.
⁸ My enemies reproach me all day long, Those who deride me swear an oath against me. ⁹ For I have eaten ashes like bread, And mingled my drink with weeping,

More vivid description of his suffering: The terrible effects of starvation are described. The reproach of enemies makes everything harder.

Psalm 102

¹⁰ Because of Your indignation and Your wrath; For You have lifted me up and cast me away. ¹¹ My days *are* like a shadow that lengthens, And I wither away like grass. ¹² But You, O LORD, shall endure forever, And the remembrance of Your name to all generations.

¹³ You will arise *and* have mercy on Zion; For the time to favor her, Yes, the set time, has come.

He is facing a sense of being cast away by God because of his suffering. Yet He knows God will be remembered in all generations.

This is happening near the time of the restoration of Zion.

Psalm 102

¹⁴ For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, And show favor to her dust.

¹⁵ So the nations shall fear the name of the LORD, And all the kings of the earth Your glory. ¹⁶ For the LORD shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory. ¹⁷ He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, And shall not despise their prayer.

The suffering people lift their hope toward Zion.

God will restore Zion, and the nations will recognize that God has done it.

God will hear the prayers of the destitute and will not despise their prayer.

Psalm 102

¹⁸ This will be written for the generation to come, That a people yet to be created may praise the LORD. ¹⁹ For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; From heaven the LORD viewed the earth, ²⁰ To hear the groaning of the prisoner, To release those appointed to death,

The Psalm is written for that generation that will suffer so terribly (and which did suffer), and God heard their prayers.

Psalm 102

²¹ To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, And His praise in Jerusalem, ²² When the peoples are gathered together, And the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. ²³ He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days. ²⁴ I said, "O my God, Do not take me away in the midst of my days; Your years *are* throughout all generations.

The survivors will be weakened by their ordeal. They will recognize that God has helped them.

Psalm 102

²⁵ Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens *are* the work of Your hands. ²⁶ They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed. ²⁷ But You *are* the same, And Your years will have no end. ²⁸ The children of Your servants will continue, And their descendants will be established before You.” (NKJV)

They will recognize that the nation will survive, and their descendants will be established before God.

God cares about every individual— when going through persecution.

God is omniscient—He hears everything. He wants us to seek Him. Even if we don't know Him yet, He wants us to pray and seek Him.

So of course He hears the prayers of people who are being persecuted!

A proper seeking prayer will ask Him to make the truth clear. A truth seeker will find Him, if searching with all his heart. He promised.

Do our sins get in the way? Yes they do. So we have to seek His forgiveness.

Removing Lack of Faith

Faith is a choice.

Faith requires choosing to trust.

Faith requires renewing our minds so we can call up reasons to trust when circumstances say otherwise.

God rewards faith. Faith is substance in His sight.

Example

- In Nazareth Jesus did not do many miracles because of the people's unbelief—Mark 6:1-6.
- In another location, in Luke 5:16-20, skeptics were present, but some friends of a paralyzed man believed.
- They exercised faith to the extent of climbing up on the roof with the paralyzed man on his stretcher, tearing up the roof, and letting him down in front of Jesus while He was speaking.

Example

Not only did Jesus heal the man, He forgave him, too. And the skeptics learned Jesus has authority to forgive sins.

The faith of those friends reached beyond the temporary healing of this man to the eternal, because through their faith, God revealed Jesus' Deity.

Their faith was substance.

Romans 8:1-2

- There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Micah 7:18

- ¹⁸ Who *is* a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?
- He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights *in* mercy. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea. (NKJV)

Homework

In 3 sets

Homework Class 12 Set 1

- Read Luke 18:1-8. What is the basis for believing that prayer works, according to this passage?
- What requirement for prayer is seen in Luke 18:9-14?
- What requirement for prayer is seen in Hebrews 11:6?
- What requirement for prayer that works is seen in 1 John 5:14-15?
- Why do you think that would be so?

Homework Class 12 Set 1

- What are the elements of Asaph's prayer in Psalm 79:8-13?
- What does God say about the people's prayer in Psalm 81:6-14?
- What does Jesus say about prayer in Matthew 6:5-15?
- What does James say about prayer in James 5:13-18?
- Read Psalm 17. What are some of the things King David prays for in this Psalm?

Homework Class 12 Set 1

- What are some of the things he is thankful for in this Psalm?
- What is the most important thing to King David in this Psalm?
- Philippians 4:6 tells us to pray about everything.
- I Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to pray without ceasing. EVERYTHING that matters to us matters to God.

Homework Class 12 Set 1

- As we walk with Him and receive His answers to prayer, we realize that He truly is with us. The only way to stay in fellowship with Him is to lift our thoughts to Him in prayer moment by moment.
- What are the proper subjects for prayer, according to Mark 11:24, John 14:13-14 and John 15:7, and Matthew 18:19?

Homework Class 12 Set 1

- This is a good time to review the lesson about forgiveness. Only 3 barriers exist to having prayer answered. (God may answer yes, no, or wait.) One barrier is having sins of one's own that need to be forgiven and another other barrier is failure to forgive others. The third barrier is unbelief—in some ways the most serious sin.

Homework Class 12 Set 2

- John 16:23 tells us to ask in a specific name. What is that name, and what does that mean, and what is the promise that goes with asking that way?
- What do you think that means?
- Matthew 18:19-20 gives a special promise for group prayer. What is that promise?
- 1 John 5:14-15 and Mark 11:22-26 tend to balance each other. How do you explain the balance?

Homework Class 12 Set 2

- Psalm 66:18—“If I regard wickedness in my heart, the LORD will not hear me.”
- Read 1 John chapter 1. How can you get rid of sins of the heart?
- From the slides, what is “spiritual breathing?”
- The second barrier is un-forgiveness toward others, which we also must deal with on a daily basis. Read Ephesians 4:26. What time of day does this suggest dealing with the issue of anger or grudges?

Homework Class 12 Set 2

- The third barrier is unbelief—which is a very serious sin in God’s sight. It is really important to Him that we believe Him. That includes believing He is able to help in our times of need. That includes believing that He wants to help, in His infinite goodness—that He ALWAYS has our best interest at heart. It especially means believing in His promises, and often His Holy Spirit will bring one of His promises to mind during our times of need. Cling to those promises. Pray those promises back to Him with thankfulness.
- Read Hebrews 3:7-19. What does verse 13 tell us to do if we sense discouragement in someone else?

Homework Class 12 Set 2

- What does this chapter tell us to do, especially in verse 14 and 15, if we find discouragement in ourselves?
- One of the difficulties of unbelief is a sense that “God might not be pleased with me.” That chart is a good test of the things that please God—and if your life is filled with the things that please Him, you can be confident that He wants to hear your prayers.
- Using the class slides, fill out the chart along with the reference where each thing is found.

Homework Class 12 Set 2

- God loves you. He is a GOOD Parent who wants to give good things to His children. Read Matthew 7:7-11. The verbs in this passage are progressive tenses, meaning that we are to ask and keep on asking, to _____ and keep on _____, to _____ and keep on _____. What is a word to describe that kind of a process?
- Persecution can cause discouragement. It is a privilege to experience persecution, and there is a special fellowship of Jesus' sufferings, according to Philippians 3:8-14. What attitudes does this passage recommend for such a time?

Homework Class 12 Set 2

- What does our suffering for Christ's Name produce, according to Romans 8:18 and
- 2 Corinthians 4:17?
- Does suffering for His sake mean He does not love us, according to Romans 8:26-39?
- The Apostle Paul experienced much persecution for the sake of the Gospel. He was human, and he describes some of his emotional response in 1 Corinthians 2:3 and 2 Corinthians 1:8-11. How does he describe himself?

Homework Class 12 Set 2

- What purpose did he find in his suffering, according to 2 Corinthians 1:1-7?
- Suffering can produce a sense of personal inadequacy, yet God wants us to be confident in our prayer life and witness. What does 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 say about that?
- What does 2 Corinthians 4:7 say about that?

Homework Class 12 Set 2

- What is seen and unseen: Faith depends upon what is unseen—so it is difficult. God expects us to love truth and to search for truth. Searching for truth leads us to Him. When God gives us enough light of truth to know we can trust Him, we should choose to do so. Then we begin to walk daily with Him. “We walk by faith and not by sight.” To be effective we have to keep trusting God when we cannot see the answers. This is especially true for our prayer life.
- Read Hebrews 11:1-3. What does this passage say faith is?

Homework Class 12 Set 2

- Faith is substance—that means in God's sight our faith is REAL. It is like an underlying bedrock stratum that He can build upon. It matters. If nobody else encourages us to have faith, we should encourage ourselves.
- Read Ecclesiastes 8:17 and 11:5. What do these passages tell us God is doing behind the scenes?
- Read Deuteronomy 29:29 and 30:19-20. What belongs to God, and what belongs to us and our children forever? How do we express faith?

Homework Class 12 Set 3

- Read Job 35:14. What did Elihu tell Job was the real situation? Was he right? What role does God's infinite nature play in this question?
- Read Colossians 2:2-3. What kind of wealth do we have?
- Read Philippians 2:13. What is one of the revealed things God is doing behind the scenes?
- When we experience persecution, is God still doing this revealed thing in us and in other people?
- Do we have to see what God is doing in this hidden realm in order to trust Him?

Homework Class 12 Set 3

- Read Ephesians 1:18-20. What kind of power does God hold and use behind the scenes?
- Read Isaiah 54:11-17. Does persecution come from God?
- Special promises go with persecution: Faith means clinging to God's promises, and reminding yourself of His promises during prayer.
- Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and 5:1-7. Why are we not supposed to lose heart?

Homework Class 12 Set 3

- What are we supposed to look at to avoid losing heart?
- Read Isaiah 55:6-11. How do our ways and the things we can see compare to God's ways?
- What does God do behind the scenes if we are brave enough to send out His word?
- Read Isaiah 59:14-21. This passage describes a time when righteous people are systematically persecuted. What does it say God does behind the scenes?

Homework Class 12 Set 3

- Read 1 Peter 4:12-19. What basis do we have for feeling blessed while experiencing persecution?
- What are we supposed to do while being persecuted?
- Read Matthew 5:10-12. What kinds of persecution are mentioned here?