



Thank you for choosing to be a part of a “One of Three” Prayer Team. The commitment you are making to partner with two other people to regularly pray will pay great dividends for you, your partners, and our church body. It will also provide a context for accountability as you seek to faithfully pursue spiritual maturity through a deepening relationship with the Lord. The resource material in this booklet is designed to encourage you as you pray. Most of the material comes from the book Battle Plan for Prayer. This book is a wonderful resource concerning prayer and I highly recommend you getting a copy. The sermon notes provided are from messages I presented during our small group study drawn from the book Battle Plan for Prayer. Again, I thank you for your willingness to partner with two other people for the purpose of prayer.

Bro. Marty

Ephesians 3:16-19 – “I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Colossians 1:9-12 – “We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of light.”

Philippians 1:9-11 – “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

The Definition of Prayer

Prayer is communion with God in order to...

- Intimately know, love, and worship Him.
- Understand and conform our lives to His will and ways.
- Access and advance His Kingdom, power, and glory.

“Prayer is a conversation between two people who love each other.”

How Does God Answer Prayer?

- By saying “Yes” immediately!
- By saying “Yes” but in due time!
- By saying “Yes” so we will learn from it.
- By saying “No” because our heart is not right.
- By saying “No” because He has a better plan for us.

Ten Locks that Bog Down our Praying

- Praying without knowing God through Jesus.
- Praying from an unrepentant heart.
- Praying for show.
- Praying repetitive, empty words.
- Prayers not prayed.
- Praying with a lustful heart.
- Praying while mistreating your spouse.
- Praying while ignoring the poor.
- Praying with bitterness in your heart toward someone.
- Praying with a faithless heart.

Ten Keys that make our Praying Effective

- Praying persistently by asking, seeking, and knocking.
- Praying in faith.
- Praying in secret.
- Praying according to God’s will.
- Praying in Jesus’ name.
- Praying in agreement with other believers.
- Praying while fasting.
- Praying from an obedient life.
- Praying while abiding in Christ and His Word.
- Pray while delighting in the Lord.

P.R.A.Y.

(Praying for non-believers)

- Pray for a paralysis of Satan.
- Pray for a repentant heart.
- Pray for an open door.
- Pray for Yourself

What is God's Will?

“Many people are convinced that God’s will is a mystery. Unknowable. All shadows and secrets. Best hunches and wild guesses. And sometimes, when trying to discern his will for a major decision, the predominant feeling at first can be indecision. Yet the best strategy to use first of all in beginning to seek God’s will for specific questions is to pray like Jesus did—to pray in surrender to it from the onset—“Not my will, but yours be done.” –Excerpt from Battle Plan for Prayer; pp. 130-131.

Three major components of God’s will...

- The chief goal of God’s will is that He be glorified.
- God’s will is to advance His Kingdom.
- God’s will is for Christ to be Lord.

Personal components of God’s will for every believer...

- He wants every believer to live a pure, sanctified life. **1 Thessalonians 4:3**
- He wants every believer to be rejoicing, praying and grateful in all circumstances. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-17.**
- He wants every believer to be maturing in the faith. **Hebrews 6:1.**
- He wants every believer to be producing fruit, season after season. **John 15:16.**
- He wants every believer to be in close fellowship with other believers, “being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.” **Philippians 2:2.**

Seven Ways the Holy Spirit Works (As it relates to salvation)

- The Holy Spirit goes with, encourages, empowers, and guides the witness.
- The Holy Spirit will convict people of their sin.
- The Holy Spirit opens eyes to the truth of the Gospel.
- The Holy Spirit enables a person to trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior.
- The Holy Spirit saves, washes, regenerates, and renews a person’s heart.
- The Holy Spirit enters and seals the heart of a new believer.
- The Holy Spirit encourages, empowers, and equips you to live the Christian life.

Seven Indicators of True Salvation

INTRODUCTION: In the book "**Battle Plan for Prayer**" seven indicators of true salvation are discussed.

Referencing **2 Corinthians 5:17**—"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new."—the authors discuss the evidence that a life-changing transformation has taken place. They state that "these seven things are not the cause or roots of salvation, but they are the fruits of true salvation." The scripture background for each is found in **1 John**.

- **Indicator 1 – A lifestyle of obedience to God.**

- **1 John 2:3-6** – "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him."
- There is no greater evidence of significant life-change than when our behavior changes. Obedience to Christ should be noticeable because it represents a shift from operating out of our old nature and operating according to our new nature.

- **Indicator 2 – A confession of Jesus as the Christ, God's Son.**

- **1 John 2:22-23** – "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also."
- Openly acknowledging that Jesus is the "Christ, the Son of the Living God" is the bedrock of our confession of faith and the heart of our testimony. It declares that Jesus, alone, is the way of salvation. "Antichrist" as used here is simply declaring that the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ is "anti" Christ or **against Christ**.

- **Indicator 3 – A lifestyle of repentance of sin.**

- **1 John 3:9-10** – "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother."
- The point here is not that we "never" sin but that sin is not the driving behavior in our lives. John acknowledges that we will continue to sin but such sin is no longer the habit of our lives.

- **Indicator 4 – Genuine love for other believers.**

- **1 John 3:14-15** – "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."
- Simply put, the world will know we are Christians because we have love for one another!

- **Indicator 5 – The discipline of God your Father.**

- **1 John 3:1** – "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"
- **Hebrews 12:5-6** – "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."
- If the Lord loves us enough to provide for our salvation does it not seem reasonable that He would also be committed to our becoming what He created us to be? Therefore His discipline in our lives, though never pleasant at the time, indicates God's ongoing commitment to us.

- **Indicator 6 – The presence of God's Holy Spirit.**

- **1 John 3:24** – "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."
- The presence of the Holy Spirit empowers us, endows us, guides us, encourages us, comforts us, protects us, warns us, and on and on.

- **Indicator 7 – Faith in Jesus alone for salvation (and not yourself).**

- **1 John 5:12-13** – "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."
- This connects back to the second indicator concerning our confession that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son. A true believer will not waver in his/her acknowledgment concerning Jesus as the only way of salvation. As our culture is proving more forcefully every day, this bedrock belief of our faith is neither universally accepted nor is it particularly popular. In fact, it is considered the height of intolerance. We must not waver, however.

CONCLUSION: Are these indicators evident in your life?

Four Strategies of the Enemy

- **Distraction...**
 - “In our day of digital demands, the enemy can easily distract us by suggesting in our heads that we chase the ding of a text, the latest buzz, or another two-minute viral video. Even while praying, he would love to get us focused on our ‘To-do’ list and the worries of the day instead of the Lord. So our Lord repeatedly warns us to ‘Watch and pray. Stay alert.’” – **Battle Plan for Prayer; page 167.**
- **Deception...**
 - “Sin will fail you, let you down, and leave you empty. But his (Satan) temptations brazenly try to assure you that if you act now, your situation will be different. It won’t affect you like it does other people. He displays the pleasure but hides the consequences. That’s why you can’t ever believe him.” – **Battle Plan for Prayer; page 168.**
- **Derision...**
 - “When he (Satan) is not lying, he’s usually running you down or running down someone else in your mind. Bringing up things from your past. Falsely presuming someone else’s guilt. Yes, you have been forgiven in the blood of Christ, yet he keeps you scraping old wounds. Inciting doubt. In order for you to deflect these accusations, you need to be studying the Word, finding your identity in Christ, and praying for wisdom and discernment. That’s how you throw out his trumped-up charges.” – **Battle Plan for Prayer; page 168.**
- **Division...**
 - “One hallmark of the gospel is the loving unity it brings to people of all nations, all backgrounds, all ages, and demographics. But Satan knows ‘if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand’ (Mark 3:25). Anger and argument among God’s people may not *destroy* the gospel, but they can destroy your testimony and effectiveness in sharing it. Disunity paints Christians as being weak, hypocritical, and phony.” – **Battle Plan for Prayer; pp. 168-167.**

Seven Responses to a Personal Attack of the Enemy (R.E.S.P.O.N.D.)

- **Resist the devil in Jesus Name!**
- **Escape with Scripture!**
- **Search for unconfessed sin!**
- **Plead the blood of Jesus! (Confess and repent knowing God forgives.)**
- **Overtake ground given to Satan! (Only God can help you regain what you have given over to the enemy.)**
- **Name someone in targeted Prayer!**
- **Delight in the Lord!**

Daily Prayer Guide
(Based on Four Types of Prayer)
(Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication)

Adoration – “Adoration is prayer that praises God.”

- Adoration sets the tone for the entire prayer.
- Adoration reminds me of God’s identity and inclination.
- Adoration purifies my heart.
- Adoration focuses on God and His attributes.
- Adoration involves praise – **Psalm 8, 19, 23, 46, 95, 100, 148**
- God is worthy of adoration.

Confession – “Confession is prayer that gets honest about sin.”

- Confession cleanses my conscience.
- Confession floods me with relief because God is forgiving.
- Confession frees me to pray.
- Confession allows God to “work on my sin.”

Thanksgiving – “Thanksgiving is God-directed, humbly expressed gratitude.”

- There is a difference between feeling grateful and expressing thanks.
- Four kinds of blessing for which to be thankful...
 - Answered Prayer
 - Spiritual Blessings
 - Relational Blessings
 - Material Blessings

Supplication/Petition – “Supplication is asking something from God for yourself or someone else.”

- People Petitions –
- Family Petitions –
- Personal Petitions –

“In this manner, therefore, pray”

A Prayer Guide based on Matthew 6:9-13

“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen!” – Matthew 6:9-13

Matthew 6:9-13 – “In this manner, therefore, pray...

- **“Our Father”**
(Acknowledges the intimate Father/Child relationship we have with the Lord.)
- **“In Heaven”**
(Speaks to the sovereign authority of the Lord sitting on His throne.)
- **“Hallowed be Your name”**
(Recognizes the holiness, the uniqueness of the Living God)
- **“Your will be done...”**
(Declares our agreement with and desire for God’s purpose and plan to be the reality in our lives and the lives of others.)
- **“Give us this day our daily bread”**
(Acknowledges that we desire and are dependent upon God’s provision.)
- **“Forgive us our debts/sins”**
(Pointed plea for God’s forgiveness of our sin)
- **“As we forgive our debtors”**
(Declares our intention to extend grace and mercy as it has been extended to us.)
- **“And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one”**
(A request for God’s leadership and protection – See John 17:15; James 1:13-15)
- **“For Yours is the Kingdom...”**
(A reiteration of God’s sovereignty and authority)

Praying through the Lord’s Prayer...

- **Take a moment and reflect upon the Father/Child relationship that you enjoy with the Living God. Express your gratitude for His love for you, His desire to be with you, His investment in you, and His invitation for you to share your life and heart with Him.**
- **Continue to reflect upon the sovereignty of God, the holiness of God and the authority of God. Praise Him for being Creator and Sustainer of all that exists.**
- **Declare your desire to be obedient to the teaching and commands of the Lord. Declare your commitment to pursuing His purpose and plan for your life.**
- **Acknowledge that everything you possess comes from the Lord. Declare your dependence upon and satisfaction with His provision for your life.**
- **Confess and seek forgiveness for the sin in your life.**

- **Commit to extending grace, mercy, and forgiveness to those who have sinned against you, those who have brought hurt and pain into your life, and those who have used and/or abused you.**
- **Pray for God's leadership to be clear and for your obedience to be complete. Pray for God's protection while you are seeking to be obedient to Him.**
- **Intercede for those for whom you have a burden. Commit them to the Lord. Perhaps refer to such passages as **Ephesians 3:16-19**, **Colossians 1:9-12**, and **Philippians 1:9-11** for direction concerning how to pray for them.**
- **Conclude by declaring again the sovereignty and authority of the Living God and your complete submission to His sovereignty and authority.**

Sermons on Prayer

SUNDAY MORNING: AUGUST 23, 2015

TEXT: MATTHEW 6:5-9a

TITLE: "IN THIS MANNER, THEREFORE, PRAY"

INTRODUCTION: In Paul's first letter to Timothy he charges him to "**wage the good warfare.**" His point is for Timothy to **remain faithful** to **his relationship with the Lord** as well as **his call to ministry from the Lord**. In his second letter he will encourage Timothy to "**stir up the gift of God which is in him.**" It is significant to note that remaining faithful to one's relationship with the Lord and developing and pursuing God's purpose and plan for one's life is considered **warfare**. The reason for that is the presence of a real adversary who is working to destroy our lives, undermine our relationship with the Lord, and sidetrack our pursuit of God's purpose and plan for our lives. Paul's follows his charge to Timothy to "**wage the good warfare**" with a **practical first step**. In **1 Timothy 2:1-4** Paul states "**Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**" **There is a war raging around us as well as in us.** It is a war defined by two natures. One nature is separated from the Living God by sin and is doomed to an eternal hell. The other nature is a redeemed nature bought by the blood of Jesus Christ and deposited in those who acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God and who submit to His Lordship and leadership. Once the war for my soul is won I become a part of God's plan to see "**all men saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.**" And the **first step** in fulfilling my part of God's plan is for "**supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks to be made for all men.**" I have often referenced **Dr. A. J. Gordon's** assessment of the priority of prayer—"You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed!" **E. M. Bounds** once wrote "Prayer is no fitful, short-lived thing. It is no voice crying unheard and unheeded in the silence. It is a voice that goes into God's ear... To a prayerful man, God is present in realized force... To a prayerful church, God is present in glorious power." **Charles Spurgeon** wrote "We must remember that the goal of prayer is the ear of God. Unless that is gained, the prayer has utterly failed. The uttering of it may have kindled devotional feeling in our minds, the hearing of it may have comforted and strengthened the hearts of those with whom we have prayed, but if the prayer has not gained the heart of God, it has failed in its essential purpose." Just a few weeks ago we examined the fact that the **privilege** and **opportunity** to speak to the One, True Living God who is Creator of all that exists, who is sovereign over all His creation, who created us for fellowship and intimacy, and who chose to give His only Son, Jesus so that our sin could be forgiven and we could be reconnected to Him is reason to say "**Amen!**" In that discussion I reminded you of **four things** of which we can be sure when we pray.

- **God always hears us!**
- **God always knows why we are asking what we asking because He understands us completely.**
- **God loves us no matter what we ask, how we ask, or the demeanor in which we ask.**
- **God will always answer our prayer petitions correctly!**

That said we cannot overstate the value of our prayer conversation with the Lord. The question that follows that conclusion is this—**is the value we place on the privilege and opportunity to pray demonstrated in the practice of prayer in our relationship with the Lord?** The answer is "**Yes.**" It is yes because whatever our practice is, it demonstrates the value we place on prayer. Whether it is little or a lot we demonstrate the value of prayer by our practice of prayer. This evening we are going to examine what is typically called the "**Lord's Prayer.**" It is Jesus' pointed teaching concerning how to pray. **Derek, Preston,** and **I** will examine each element of Jesus' instruction. We will seek to clarify the significance of each phrase in Jesus' model prayer. You will receive a **prayer guide** that will enable you to pray using the "**Lord's Prayer.**" We will spend considerable time in prayer. This may be one of the most instructive lessons on prayer we have offered in a long time. I cannot urge you enough to be a part of the service this evening. You may not be in the habit of attending on Sunday evening. You need to make an exception this evening. But that is tonight. For the next few minutes I want to examine what Jesus says before He lays out His model prayer. In **Matthew 6:5-9a** Jesus discusses what should be the **demeanor** of our prayer conversation. (**READ – Matthew 6:1-9a**)

- **Anonymous Giving, Closed Door Praying & Faceless Fasting.**
(It is clear in Jesus' teaching that **motivation matters.** Why we do what we do is a crucial part of living out our faith. In **Matthew 6** Jesus addresses the issue of **motivation** from **three perspectives.** The **first** concerns the motivation for giving to the needy, the **second** the motivation behind one's praying and the **third** the motivation for fasting. In each instance Jesus draws the distinction between doing something so others will see it, thereby holding you in esteem and doing something for the sake of giving God glory with no recognition from those around you. In each instance the reward for doing something for personal recognition is just that, recognition.

Doing something for the sake of giving God glory, however, will result in God being pleased and God blessing the effort. There are times when the acknowledgement of good works is positive. If they offer us the opportunity to point people to the Lord and not ourselves or if they serve to spur others to good works then such recognition is good. But if they steal from God's glory then their value is diminished. In the matter of prayer the comparison is between those who pray publicly to bring attention to their presumed piety and those who pray for the single purpose of gaining the ear of the Living God.)

- **Verse 5...**
(**Public prayer** should always “represent the overflow of a vibrant personal prayer life.” It should also “reflect a genuine conversation with God.” The “**hypocrite**” described in this verse is the person who prays not to gain the ear of God but to impress those gathered by their flowery and no doubt long-winded monologues offered as prayer. Their motivation is to be seen and heard. The term “**hypocrite**” refers to someone acting out a part or playing a character. In this context the hypocrite is someone pretending to pray when in reality they are only acting.)
- **Verse 6...**
(Again, speaking from the perspective of motivation, Jesus instructs the one truly wanting to have a conversation with the Living God to withdraw from the public arena, retreat to a private place where there are no distractions, close the door and have a genuine conversation with the Lord. The emphasis is on intimate conversation, careful and honest communication, and a desire to hear from the Lord without distraction. The movie **War Room** that we are scheduled to attend next weekend focuses on the value of such closed door conversations with the Lord. Jesus clearly identifies the Father as the one to whom we pray. In the model prayer that follows that intimate relationship is foundational to effectively communicating with the Lord.)
- **Verse 7...**
(Jesus makes another comparison in this verse to those seeking to impress their listeners rather than communicate with the Lord. In this case it concerns “**vain repetitions**.” The **NKJV** translates Jesus' words as “do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do.” The **NIV** translates the phrase as “do not keep on babbling like pagans.” The caution is against using repetitious phrases offered as religious sounding incantations. Jesus makes it clear the Father is not impressed with flowery and long-winded monologues. He wants to hear the clear, simple desires and concerns of our hearts. The point has more to do with senseless babbling than persistence. We are invited and even urged to pray with persistence.)
- **Verse 8...**
(The fact that the Father knows what we need before we ask reminds those listening to Jesus that petitions offered to the Father are not revealing something He does not already know we need. Our requests and subsequent dependence upon His provision demonstrates our faith that He will hear us and answer us according to His purpose and plan for our lives.)
- **Verse 9a...**
(Jesus therefore presents those listening a model prayer that incorporates what He has been saying—“**In this manner, therefore, pray.**” Again we will examine this model prayer in detail this evening.)

CONCLUSION: According to these verses what should the demeanor of our prayer conversation be? **First** it should reflect our desire for genuine conversation with the Lord. **Do we really want to talk to the Lord?** **Second** it should aim for intimacy based on a growing and deepening relationship with our Father. **Do I really want to reveal my deepest thoughts and concerns to the Lord?** **Third** it should seek to avoid any pretense on our part but rather be an expression of our gratitude for the opportunity and privilege of coming into the Father's presence. **Do I really understand what a privilege it is to speak with the Living God and if I do, does it not seem appropriate that I shut out as much distraction as possible so I can focus on being in His presence?**

Do you want to learn how to pray more powerfully, effectively, correctly, and passionately? Do you want to learn how to intercede for others according to God's purpose and plan? Do you want to hear more clearly from the Lord? Jesus offers instruction on how to do those things. We will examine and practice His instruction this evening. This morning I wonder how many of you God has been dealing with concerning your prayer and devotional life. How many of you have been challenged and how many have been encouraged? How many of you have something you need to talk to the Lord about right now while it's fresh on your mind? How many of you have someone you need to intercede for before you leave this building? Don't put off what God has put in your heart to do.

SUNDAY MORNING: SEPTEMBER 13, 2015

TEXT: NEHEMIAH 1:1-4

TITLE: "A BURDEN SO GREAT"

INTRODUCTION: In the sermon series "**And All the People Said Amen**" one of the things we noted that should cause us to say "**Amen**" is the **opportunity** and **privilege** we possess to have a **conversation with the Living God**. A couple of weeks ago we examined what Jesus said about the **proper demeanor for a conversation with the Lord**. In that discussion we noted that the **proper demeanor** should **first of all** reflect our desire for genuine conversation with the Lord. It should indicate that we really **do we want to talk to the Lord**. **Secondly** it should aim for intimacy based on a growing and deepening relationship with our Father. It should reflect the fact that I **really do want to reveal my deepest thoughts and concerns to the Lord**. And **thirdly** it should **seek to avoid any pretense on our part but rather be an expression of our gratitude for the opportunity and privilege of coming into the Father's presence**. It should reflect that **I really do understand what a privilege it is to speak with the Living God and since I do, I will shut out as much distraction as possible so I can focus on being in His presence?**

We followed that Sunday morning discussion by examining Jesus' instructions concerning how to pray. That evening we looked at each element in the Lord's Prayer and then spent time praying using the Lord's Prayer as our model. The following **Wednesday evening** I shared some things from a message I had preached several years ago that focused on things that **drive us to pray**. I mentioned **four things**. **1)** We are driven to pray in times of **total desperation**. When we have no other options, we tend to cry out to God. **2)** We are driven to pray in times of **absolute confusion**. We come to the "**forks**" in the road and have absolutely no idea which way to go. The future is uncertain. We are confused. It is as if we are in a maze with no idea where to turn. It is times like this that drive men to pray. We pray for guidance, direction, insight, help, etc. We look for signs and we put out "fleeces." **3)** We are driven to pray in times of **serious decision-making**. Driven by the "**forks**" in our road, we seriously seek God's guidance. **4)** We are driven to pray in times of **incredible spiritual ecstasy**. These are those times when we are trying to maintain a mountaintop experience. Each of us can identify times when one or more or all of these motivating factors have driven us to pray. This evening we begin a study that focuses on developing our prayer conversation with the Lord. It will inform and challenge us to develop a "**battle plan for prayer**." Developing a "**battle plan for prayer**" assumes that we have a reason to pray and that reason is serious and significant to our faith journey. Again, let me repeat those four things that often drive us to pray—**1) total desperation 2) absolute confusion 3) serious decision-making 4) incredible spiritual ecstasy**. For the next few minutes I want to examine what drove one man to pray. His prayer was not casual or light-hearted. It originated from a broken heart and consumed his energy. It sought direction and assurance from the Lord. **READ – Nehemiah 1:1-4.**

A little bit of background will be helpful for our understanding of **Nehemiah's** drive to pray. After being taken into exile by **Nebuchadnezzar**, Israel spent the next **seventy years** under God's judgment and discipline. When **Babylon** is defeated by the **Persians** and **Cyrus** comes to power it is his edict that releases Israel from captivity and allows them to begin returning home. This process takes place in waves over a number of years. The first exiles return to find Jerusalem and the surrounding area still in ruins from Nebuchadnezzar's destructive ransacking. Initially the people lay a foundation for a new temple but almost immediately abandon the project in favor of building themselves homes and planting crops for food. It would take them **twenty-two years** to get back to rebuilding the temple and **four-and-a-half years** to finally complete the project. By the time Nehemiah becomes a part of Israel's narrative some **one hundred years** has passed. The word he receives is that after over one hundred years Jerusalem still lies in a state of ruins. The wall around Jerusalem is still broken down and the entrance gates into the city are still burned out. The return of Israel from exile marked the end of God's judgment for their past sins. It was the first step in rebuilding their fractured relationship with the Lord. **Returning to the Promised Land was the manifestation of God's grace toward them**. What they did once they returned would be evidence of their repentance and desire to rebuild their relationship with the Lord. Their slowness to rebuild the temple and then their inattention to rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem represented their lack of desire and commitment to rebuild that relationship. What Nehemiah is responding to is this lack of passion, desire, and commitment to fully restore their relationship with the Lord. Both his broken heartedness and demeanor before the Lord indicate the depth of his motivation to intercede on behalf of the people of God.

- **The Report Concerning Jerusalem...**

(Those who had returned to Jerusalem are described as "**in great distress and reproach**." The word for "**distress**" is translated as "**trouble**" in the **NIV** and the term for "**reproach**" is translated "**disgrace**." I believe the best understanding would be that the people are "**beside themselves**" and have "**wilted to a point of impotence**." They are stuck where they are and do not know how to move forward. Both the magnitude of what needs to be done and the opposition to doing it have them wringing their hands. Again the situation is a

picture of their relationship with the Lord. If they had been committed to reestablishing that relationship they would not be in the condition they are in.)

- **Nehemiah's Response to the Report...**

(Nehemiah is broken hearted. He is emotionally and spiritually devastated. He grieves deeply for the people and the situation as it exists. He enters into a time of deep, focused prayer before the Lord. What drives him to pray? The magnitude of the situation both physically and spiritually grips his soul. He can do nothing less than engage in a time of uninterrupted prayer.)

- **Nehemiah's Prayer is Pointed and Passionate...**

- **Verse 5** – note his reverence for and understanding of God's sovereignty, majesty, mercy, and faithfulness.
- **Verse 6** – note his plea that God would listen to his prayer. Note also his recognition of Israel's sin and his inclusion of himself as needing to confess.
- **Verse 7** – a confession of sin.
- **Verses 8-10** – Nehemiah recalls the word of God as recorded in Deuteronomy concerning the situation as it exists. He appeals to the ultimate desire of God to bring His people into the Promised Land. He believes that the condition that exists is not what God ultimately desires and therefore appeals for God to remember His promise to bless those He has redeemed.
- **Verse 11** – again he appeals to the Lord to hear his prayer. He also prays for his own next step in approaching **King Artaxerxes** for permission to travel to Jerusalem and lead in rebuilding the broken down walls and burned out gates.

CONCLUSION: Nehemiah was driven to pray. He was consumed by the spiritual condition of the people in Jerusalem and the condition of the city. His was not a prayer prayed from a distance so that God would intervene and the people would get their "**spiritual act**" together. His prayer was prayed with a desire to be a part of the solution. He desired to lend his expertise and passion to the process. His prayer is an example of pouring out one's heart over an obvious need and seeking to be used to facilitate the answer. Nehemiah has a personal burden that only personal sacrifice and investment can lift. What is the burden of your heart at this moment? What has your spirit so captivated that you are drawn to powerful, passionate, protracted prayer? What is your prayer that is so serious that you are seeking ways to be used by God to bring about His will?

SUNDAY MORNING: SEPTEMBER 27, 2015

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

TITLE: “A Prayer of Desperation”

INTRODUCTION: We have completed two weeks of the study “**Battle Plan for Prayer.**” To this point we have discussed what it means to be devoted to prayer so that we are obedient to the biblical encouragement to “pray without ceasing.” Such devotion **dictates** that we establish a scheduled time of prayer each day. It also involves the habit of spontaneous prayer throughout the day as we establish specific prompters that remind us to pray. This evening and next week we will focus on the different types of prayer. A couple of weeks ago we examined the prayer that **Nehemiah** prayed when he was informed of the physical condition of the city of Jerusalem which was a reflection of the spiritual condition of the people in Jerusalem who had returned home from exile. The broken down walls and burned out gates of the city represented their lack of desire and commitment to rebuild their relationship with the Lord even when His grace and mercy had allowed them to return home. We discussed the brokenness in Nehemiah’s heart over both the condition of the city and the spiritual condition of the people as the motivation for his desperate plea for God to intervene. We noted that his prayer included his own commitment to be a part of God’s solution in the matter. This morning I want to examine another man who was driven to pray out of a sense of desperation. God’s answer to his desperate prayer is often quoted. **READ – 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.**

The larger context for these verses involves Paul’s defending himself as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. There were those among the believers in Corinth that boasted concerning their authority, their Jewish heritage, their ability to speak, their advanced knowledge of the Law as well as other things. The believer’s in Corinth were impressed by such boasting. They were taken in by the arrogant claims of these false teachers whose agenda was to promote themselves rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Paul’s demeanor among them was one of humility and he refused to allow them to “**take care of him**” choosing rather to make his own way his authority and credibility as a legitimate apostle was being called into question. Paul’s response was to offer some boasting of his own but in doing so he carefully and clearly established the folly of such boasting. He wanted them to know that he could boast but had chosen not to do so. **His goal was to boast concerning the power and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ not himself.** But to make his point he stresses that he too is a Hebrew just as the false teachers. He speaks of his sufferings for the sake of the gospel—**11:22-32.** He also speaks of the “**visions and revelations of the Lord**” he has received. God had come to Paul in visions numerous times to affirm His activity, to offer him encouragement, and to provide him with direction. In the beginning of **Chapter 12** he relates a story of a man who was “**caught up to the third heaven.**” Obviously a man who had been carried into the presence of God in heaven would have reason to boast. Paul is no doubt referring to himself in this story even though he speaks of himself in the third person. Several explanations for this have been presented but the best I believe is his desire to downplay boasting about himself even though he is doing so to make a point. **Two things** of note in this experience are that it took place fourteen years earlier and that he heard inexpressible things from the Lord while in His presence. The uniqueness and magnitude of such an experience comes with potential danger. It was obviously a “**life-changing experience.**” The **inherent danger** associated with it is that **one becomes fixated on the event and succumbs to pride that leads to self-importance.** **Verse 7** says as much when **Paul states** that “**lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me.**” In **v. 6** he had acknowledged that he had not spoken of this event for fourteen years “**lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.**” Paul was committed to lift up Jesus and not himself. Consequently, as we noted, he reveals in **v. 7** that God Himself had taken measures to prevent him from becoming prideful over this experience. **Warren Wiersbe** commented on the passage by stating “**The Lord knows how to balance our lives. If we have only blessings, we may become proud; so He permits us to have burdens as well. Paul’s great experience in heaven could have ruined his ministry on earth; so God, in His goodness, permitted Satan to buffet Paul in order to keep him from becoming proud.**”

- **Verse 7...**

(We may be uncomfortable with the truth in this verse but remember that God’s purpose and plan for our lives is to become like His Son Jesus. It is to become what He created us to be. It is imperative that we interpret this truth through the lens of God’s larger purpose and plan. It is also important to understand it from Paul’s perspective. From Paul’s perspective he had been “**given**” a “**thorn in the flesh.**” The **purpose** for giving him a thorn was to **keep him from becoming prideful** and therefore **to keep him from sinning.** The word translated “**thorn**” refers to a “**sharp stake used to impale someone.**” That is not exactly like a sticker in one’s foot from going barefoot in the yard or a splinter from a piece of wood. It speaks of a debilitating difficulty that impacts Paul’s quality of life and has the potential to inhibit his ministry. Paul refers to this thorn as a “**messenger from Satan**” intended to “**buffet**” him. We must assume that God has allowed Satan to adversely impact Paul’s life in some way. Whatever this thorn is, the enemy is using it to cause Paul pain and bring suffering. “**Buffet**” refers to **being beaten as with someone’s fists** or to being “**slapped around.**” The **tense**

of the word implies that this suffering was **persistent**. Again let me say clearly that the purpose for this adversity is to keep Paul from sinning by succumbing to pride.)

- **Verse 8...**

(Paul's initial response to whatever this impaling instrument might be is to pray and to pray fervently. **Three times** he pleaded with the Lord to remove it. Paul is not unlike any of us. Our first response to any adversity, let alone adversity that is persistent and debilitating is to seek relief and removal. Paul had witnessed the miraculous power of God in healing. He had been the conduit for such demonstrations of God's power. He knew firsthand from being struck blind during his conversion and then later receiving his sight again. Certainly his expectation would be the removal of whatever this was. But that is not what happened. In his desperation he prayed and prayed fervently. And God answered. But it was not the answer Paul wanted. But it became the answer he learned to appreciate.)

- **Verse 9...**

(Paul records God's answer to his fervent plea—"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." In other words this debilitating thing in his flesh would remain. There would be no miraculous healing. There would be no dramatic release from adversity. No, he would have to continue to deal with it. But in dealing with it Paul would be less likely to succumb to the sin of pride. We are familiar with these words. "**Grace**" is **God's favor**. It is His love toward us demonstrated. It is His presence realized. The presence and power of God in Paul's life would be **sufficient** to endure this affliction. As we often note the grace of God is not only sufficient in every situation is more than sufficient—REF: Ephesians 3:20-21 – "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." "**My strength is made perfect in weakness**" refers to the resident power of God being manifested completely in any and all situations so that when we are weak and inadequate, His power becomes our strength. Therefore Paul shifts his perspective concerning this debilitating issue in his life. Rather than continue to plead for its removal he seeks to let God's power be demonstrated through the weakness it brings.)

- **Verse 10...**

(Paul continues his thought by declaring that he "**takes pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**" Paul is not being trite at this point. He is not making light of suffering. He is putting his suffering for "**Christ's sake**" in perspective. If the power of God can be demonstrated in his life through his weakness so that others can see God at work and give Him glory then he recognizes that his weakness has become a strength in the larger plan of God. God will sustain him. Therefore he will trust God even in this adversity. For "**Christ's sake**" is significant. Far too often we bring suffering to bear in our lives because of poor decision-making or because we revert to following the path of our former sin nature. It is our decision to make decisions that do not bring added adversity to our lives. The simple fact that we are human and are susceptible to the frailties that come with being human should remind us to not invite more suffering by making poor decisions.)

CONCLUSION: The truth in these verses is profound. On the one hand we are reminded that life is not "**thorn-free**." We are also reminded that adversity in our lives is sometimes of our own making and sometimes it is of the Lord's making. Sometimes God "**gifts**" us with things **designed** to build our character, develop our dependence upon Him, and demonstrate His grace and power to those who are not believers. Sometimes adversity is meant to keep us from succumbing to the sin of pride. I also believe we are reminded in these verses that fervent prayer is always appropriate and persistence in petitioning the Lord is proper. We must also recognize in these verses that listening for God's answer is equally important. The heart of any prayer is faith. It is believing that God cares and listens and desires to work in and through our lives. You may have something significant for which you are petitioning the Lord in your life. It may be a "thorn" or a decision or a burden for someone else. Let me assure you that God wants to hear from you and that He wants to answer you. Let me encourage you to be persistent in your petition, faithful in your study of God's word and being as committed to listening as you are petitioning. And in all things remember—"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

SUNDAY MORNING: OCTOBER 4, 2015
TEXT: 1 CHRONICLES 28:1-10
TITLE: "A BURNING DESIRE"

INTRODUCTION: Last Wednesday evening I referenced **Stephen** and **Alex Kendrick's** book **Battle Plan for Prayer** where they stated—"Answered prayers aren't merely highly unlikely coincidences. They are fingerprints of a living, loving God who invites all of us to draw close to Him." Fingerprints are proof that someone has touched something. They prove that someone has been somewhere. They are evidence of one's activity. Answered prayers are certainly evidence that God has been active. **Answered prayers indicate that God has listened to the one praying and has responded to whatever has been petitioned.** Whether His answer is yes, no, or wait doesn't matter. The fact that He answers indicates that He is present and involved in our lives. I like having God's fingerprints all over my life. A couple of weeks ago we examined the **desperate prayer** of **Nehemiah** concerning both the physical condition of Jerusalem and the spiritual condition of the people who had returned from exile. Both conditions were in need of repair. He desperately pleaded with the Lord to let Him be a part of addressing the need. God's answer was "yes." Last week we examined the **desperate prayer** of **Paul** concerning the debilitating thorn in his flesh. He sought relief and healing on three separate occasions but God's answer was "no." There was a purpose for that thorn and it was in Paul's best interest to bear it. But God's answer also included the promise that His grace would be sufficient for Paul. He told Paul that "My strength is made perfect in weakness." So we acknowledge that sometimes God answers our petitions with yes and sometimes He answers with no. This morning I want to examine an occasion when God's answers both **yes** and **no**. **READ – 1 Chronicles 28:1-10.**

- **David Had a Burning Desire to build a House for the Lord.**

(A little background is helpful to understand what is unfolding in these verses. David is in the last years of his reign as king. It has been a rollercoaster ride for David. From the early difficulty of replacing Saul as king to David's indiscretions with Bathsheba and his subsequent cover-up that included murder to the attempts to overthrow him by his own children, David's reign had been a challenging one. The one constant in all of this was God's presence. God did not forsake David at any point but He did hold him accountable for his actions. David paid a high price for his indiscretions but in paying that price he also learned that God was graceful. He learned what it meant for "The Lord to be his Shepherd." He learned that the sacrifices that matter to the Lord are "a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart." He experienced God "restoring to him the joy of His salvation" and he knew what it was like for God to "uphold him with His generous Spirit." Therefore **David declared** in **Psalm 27:1** – "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" And in **Psalm 18:1-3** he wrote "I will love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my Rock and my Fortress and my Deliverer; my God, my strength in whom I will trust; my Shield and the Horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from enemies." Consequently after all the ups and downs of his life David surveyed the kingdom that God had given him. He acknowledged all the battles he had fought and the victories God had provided and **he determined to build a house for God.** With the battles won and the kingdom relatively secure he could turn his attention to providing a house for the Lord. It would be a permanent place for God to dwell. It would be a place to house the **Ark of the Covenant**. **No longer would the House of the Lord be a tent.** So David began the process of drawing plans and gathering materials to build the Lord a house. God, however, had other plans for building His house and David was not to be the one to build it.)

- **It was not God's Plan for David to Build His House.**

(The word from the Lord that David was not to build His house is recorded in several places. For reference you can read **1 Chronicles 17**. In that passage it is revealed that David spoke to **Nathan**, God's prophet, concerning his desire to build a house for the Lord. In that conversation **Nathan advises David** to "do all that is in your heart, for God is with you." He essentially gives David the green light to follow the desires of his heart. However, the very night he encouraged David to move forward God spoke to Nathan and revealed that He had other plans for building His house and David would not be the one to do so. The specific reason given David outlines in the passage we read earlier—**1 Chronicles 28:3** – "But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name, because you have been a man of war and have shed blood.'" In other passages that record the particulars of these events God reveals that His house will be built by David's son Solomon who will be a man of rest and peace. In the sovereignty of God it will be the man of war who will pave the way for the building of God's house and it will be the man of peace who will build it. This word for the Lord creates a significant moment for David and his faith walk. It is what **Henry Blackaby** in **Experiencing God** calls a "crises of belief." How will David respond to the Lord's "NO" in reference to his desire to build God's house? He could have responded numerous ways.

➤ He could have become **mad** and **bitter** because God would not let him build the house.

- He could have thrown, as we used to say where I grew up, a “**hissy fit!**” He could have thought he deserved the right to do what he wanted to do.
- He also could have responded with hurt and become distant from the Lord. He could have nursed his hurt feelings and let them fester under the surface.
- He also could have gone ahead and done it anyway. I imagine each one of us can recall a time when we went ahead and did what we wanted to do even when we knew we shouldn’t do so.

David did not respond in any of these ways, however. In **1 Chronicles 17** it is recorded that David accepted the decision of the Lord and declared in **v. 20** – “**O Lord, there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You.**” Rather than argue, debate, or reject God’s leading concerning the desire of his heart, David chose to accept God’s plan and be obedient to His leading. That is always the issue at hand when we pray and God’s answer is different from what we have asked. **Will we trust His sovereignty, accept His will, and follow His leading even when we wanted something else?**

- **David seized the Opportunity to Prepare the Way for Building God’s House.**

(I stated in the beginning that we were examining a situation where God answered a prayer with both a “**yes**” and a “**no**.” As to David’s desire to build the House of God the answer was “**no**.” As to the legitimacy of the request, however, God’s answer was “**yes**.” He would allow His House to be built but it would be David’s son, Solomon who would do so. In response to the “**no**” David seized the opportunity to make preparations to build God’s House. In the passage we read earlier there were some definitive steps taken toward that goal.

- **He began to gather materials.** David had, in fact, already begun to gather materials for the project. God did not forbid him to gather the necessary materials.
- **He began drawing plans as God revealed them.** In **vv. 11-19** David provides Solomon with both plans and materials for the project. In **v. 11** David gave Solomon the plans for the House of God. The plans included the vestibule, its outer chambers, its inner chambers, the place for the mercy seat, etc. All of these David acknowledges were revealed by the Spirit of God. In **v. 19** he states that “**the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans.**”
- **He garnered support for the project from the leaders of Israel.** In **v. 1** it is listed all the leaders David gathered together. In **v. 8** he admonishes them to “**seek out all the commandments of the Lord you God that you may possess this good land, and leave it as an inheritance for your children after you forever.**” It was especially significant that the elders and leaders of the nation know that David was passing on the kingdom to his son Solomon at the command of the Lord. It is also significant that David address the fact that he will pass from the scene but God, Who has been in charge the entire time, would continue to work in and through Solomon.
- **He gave Solomon guidance concerning his becoming king and tackling the task of building God’s House.** In **vv. 9-10** David challenges Solomon to “**know the God of your Father.**” He calls upon him to “**serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind.**” He reminds Solomon that God knows the heart and the mind of a man and understands the intent of his thoughts. **God will never be fooled nor will He be sidestepped.** It is incumbent upon Solomon to never forsake the Lord. In **v. 20** he encourages him to “**be strong and of good courage, and do it; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God—my God—will be with you.**” He reminds him that “**God will never leave him nor forsake him, until he has finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord.**”

CONCLUSION: One of the marks of maturity is how we respond when we do not get our way. It has been my experience that I have not always gotten my way. And that is a good thing. Some of the things I have wanted through the years would not have been what was best for me. In some cases God has led me in other directions and I followed without argument. In other cases I have been more stubborn and God has simply overruled me. In a few cases He has allowed me to have what I wanted and taught me the value of following His leadership. God did not give David the desire of his heart concerning building His House. He did allow him to be a part of the process, however. And David seized that opportunity. There is a significant spiritual truth in this story that we need to get. God’s plan to engage the world with His gospel continues to unfold in each generation. Each of us is part of a generation tasked with being faithful to what God has called us to do. Our generation stands upon the faithfulness and obedience of the generation that preceded us. The next generation will stand upon our faithfulness and our obedience. David response to God’s “**no**” concerning building His House paved the way for the next generation, Solomon’s generation, to complete that task. **Our obedience to the Lord always has application in the present as well as implications for the future. No generation stands alone!** I believe that if we are faithful to what God has called us to do we will build a foundation upon which the next generation can stand. Simply put, it is never just about us. It is always about the Kingdom work of the Lord!

SUNDAY MORNING: OCTOBER 18, 2015

TEXT: JAMES 1:5-8

TITLE: "FAITH IS NOT BLIND"

INTRODUCTION: The focus this evening in our study "The Battle Plan for Prayer" will be "praying in faith." Unwavering faith in the character and trustworthiness of the Lord should always undergird our prayer conversation with Him. Our faith in His trustworthiness should shape our petitions, encourage our willingness to wait for His answer, lead us to accept His answer, and then drive our obedience based on His answer. Praying in faith exudes confidence in God's goodness. In the book, The Battle Plan for Prayer, Alex and Stephen Kendrick state "When you pray, you should rest in the fact that God is not unaware, unable, uncaring, unwilling, or unlikely to answer. That's why He keeps prompting you to ask in faith." The significance of praying in faith is highlighted in **James 1:5-8** – "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." Obviously, praying in faith matters. I would suggest to you that our willingness to pray in faith is a **reflection** of our willingness to walk in faith daily. **If we are not walking in faith we are not likely to be praying in faith.** The two are inseparably linked. I believe we would all agree that our enemy Satan would like to convince us that walking in faith and praying in faith are futile exercises. He often tries to characterize our faith as a "**risky leap into the unknown.**" He questions the wisdom of "**blindly following Jesus.**" It is ironic that "**stepping out in faith**" is often described as moving from the light into the darkness. Several years ago I preached a message in which I discussed the fact that walking in faith is not stepping from the light into the darkness but the exact opposite. It is stepping from the darkness into the light. Blind faith is a misrepresentation of biblically following Jesus. It is also a misrepresentation of praying in faith. When we pray in faith we are not throwing petitions against a wall in Heaven hoping some of them will stick. We are petitioning God based on His character, trustworthiness, and goodness believing that He will respond according to His plan and purpose for our lives. Praying in faith is not blindly throwing petitions to the Lord hoping He will answer them. It is purposely petitioning the Lord based on His purpose and promises. Consider with me then a definition of faith.

- **Defining Faith...**

(The passage that is often referenced to define faith is **Hebrews 11:1**—"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." I have examined this verse several times in the past. The **working definition** of faith drawn from this verse is "**trusting God to tell the truth and keep His promises.**" Faith can be described as a "**response to the character and word of God.**" As such, "**walking in faith**" and "**praying in faith**" is actually evidence of a faith already engaged. Consider what the writer of Hebrews says about faith. **It is first of all the "substance of things hoped for."** **Substance (Gr. – hypostasis)** is a term translated numerous ways. Perhaps "**confidence**" captures the meaning best. Consequently it could refer to one's foundation for trusting God. Therefore, it is what one **builds upon** or **stands on.** Thus, faith is the **foundation for all our hope in Christ.** We believe God will **honor his word and keep His promises. It is secondly the "evidence of things not seen."** **Evidence** is a term that refers to "**that which provides proof.**" Thus, our faith in God's character and integrity allows us to **believe God when circumstances seem impossible and all the facts are not known.** This is not "**blind faith.**" It is faith based on God's revelation of Himself. Therefore walking and praying in faith is not a leap into the darkness but is a step into the light. It is our response to what God has revealed about Himself. Consider some references that speak of His self-revelation.)

- **Evidence that Faith is not Blind.**

- **John 20:30-31** – "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."
- **1 John 1:1-3** – "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."
- **Luke 1:1-4** – "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed."

- **Acts 1:1-3** – “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.”

It is obvious from these references that God’s self-revelation is extensive and clearly presented. The Old Testament provides a running commentary of God’s intentions to provide a Messiah that will reconnect man with God. The New Testament introduces us to the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and offers ample evidence of His identity, nature, acts, teaching, death, burial, resurrection and ascension. Add to such extensive revelation the declaration of **Psalm 19** that “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” and the notion that a **faith belief** in the **Living God through His Son Jesus** is a **blind faith** becomes ludicrous. The faith that engages eternal salvation is a faith in something tangible. It is faith in something real. It is faith in something seen, heard, and touched. It is faith in a person and His name is Jesus.)

- **Faith Engaged...**

(To illustrate the fact that our faith is in the person Jesus let me reference another event I have taught from on numerous occasions, the feeding of the 5000. Those who came to Jesus for a meal quickly left when the demands of really following Jesus were presented. Inquiring of the disciples whether or not they would leave also, Peter responded with **three** significant assertions—**1)** “Lord, to whom shall we go?” **2)** “You have the words of life.” **3)** “We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” As I have stated in the past reversing the order of his assertions sheds significant light on his declaration. **Because they have been following Jesus and observing His actions and listening to His teachings they have come to believe that what He says is the truth. Consequently they have determined that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and they have nowhere else to go!** Their faith in Jesus was not blind. It was in fact very well informed. The object of their faith was Jesus. Not only was the object of their faith clearly defined but the manifestation of their faith was evident. They manifested their faith by following Jesus. They expressed their faith by recognizing that Jesus is Lord and they were his servants/slaves. Faith is not blind that clearly identifies the object of that faith and the process for manifesting that faith. Faith is not blind that chooses to follow Jesus based on His character, integrity, and promises. Even when there is some element of the unknown in the path following Jesus takes us, we follow Him because we trust Him. **God has not asked us to blindly follow Him. He has asked to faithfully follow Him.** His self-revelation of Himself allows us to exercise faith in Him with our eyes wide open.)

- **Faith Continued!**

(Let me go back to **James 1:5-8** at this point and examine what James says about the relationship between prayer and faith. In **v. 2** James encourages the readers to “**count it all joy**” when they find themselves surrounded by trouble. The idea is to consider such trials as positive because they develop one’s faith. Developing one’s faith produces patience which is a word that means to “**remain**” or “**stay put.**” In other words faith in God that is developed in adversity is a faith that will not wither nor falter. As it relates to praying in faith James uses praying for wisdom to illustrate the relationship between prayer and faith. “**If**” in **v. 5** should be interpreted as “**since**” meaning that the readers need to pray for wisdom. The promise given is that God desires to give wisdom which is the practical use of one’s knowledge. Knowledge is of little importance if we do not know what to do with it. So the picture James paints is this. By asking in faith we can receive from God the practical application for the knowledge He has given us. However, if we do not ask in faith but ask doubting God’s ability or desire to respond He is not obligated to provide us with practical wisdom. James describes doubt as “**waves of the sea driven by the wind.**” Praying without faith is aimless. It is based on which direction the wind is blowing. It does not recognize that God has a plan and purpose and is not based on the pursuit of being what God created us to be. It is rarely strategic and has no thought of what comes next. James describes the person who prays without faith as being “**double-minded.**” This is a word unique to James that means “**double-souled.**” The implication is the individual is unable to set his feet, is unstable, and staggers as a drunken man filled with drink. Praying with faith is just the opposite. It implies trust and confidence in God’s sovereign design.

CONCLUSION: Praying in faith is not blindly throwing petitions God’s direction in hopes He will answer us. Praying in faith believes God has a plan and purpose for us and when we pray according to that plan and purpose we can be confident that He will answer accordingly. Praying in faith is praying with our eyes wide open and our hearts fully trusting in His promises. Praying in faith is a testimony to our commitment to follow Jesus completely. When you pray do you pray in faith?

SUNDAY MORNING: OCTOBER 25, 2015

TEXT: NEHEMIAH 2:1-9

TITLE: “PRAYING, WAITING, & PLANNING – A STRATEGY FOR BEING PREPARED WHEN GOD ANSWERS OUR PRAYER”

INTRODUCTION: The focus last Sunday in our study “**The Battle Plan for Prayer**” concerned “**praying in faith.**” Sunday morning I examined **James 1:3-8** where **James** challenged his readers to **pray in faith** concerning their need for wisdom. He reminded them to “**ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.**” We noted that our **willingness to pray in faith** is a **reflection** of our **willingness to walk in faith**. If we are not walking in faith we are not likely to be praying in faith. We also noted a **working definition of faith** as “**trusting God to tell the truth and keep His promises.**” In the study Sunday evening we were reminded that praying in faith means that we **petition God** based on His character, trustworthiness, and goodness believing that He will respond according to His plan and purpose for our lives. Praying in faith also involves a willingness to “**wait on the Lord to answer His way, in His timing.**” Waiting on the Lord, however, does not mean being idle while we wait but being active in obedience to the revealed truth and will of the Lord that we have already received. **Praying in faith according to God’s promises also means that we prepare for His answer.** A story that has circulated for years and in numerous versions illustrates this point. A rural community was gripped in a devastating drought and crops were literally burning up in the fields. The pastor of a local congregation called a special meeting to pray for rain. As the community gathered and filled the little church building the pastor surveyed those coming in to pray. When the building was full he rose and addressed the crowd—“**Brothers and Sisters we know why we are here. Now what I want to know is did you bring your umbrellas?**” That would seem to define praying in faith. I want to continue the discussion concerning praying in faith this morning. I want to examine the relationship between praying in faith, waiting on the Lord to answer, and preparing for His answer based on our faith. Preparing for God to answer our prayers by having a plan in place to respond is a part of praying in faith. Several weeks ago we examined the desperate prayer of **Nehemiah** after he received news of the still broken down and burned out walls and gates of Jerusalem. Over one hundred years after the first wave of exiles had returned to Jerusalem from captivity the effects of God’s judgment was still evident in the war-ravaged city. Nehemiah knew that the broken down walls and burned out gates of Jerusalem were an indication of the still broken spiritual relationship between Israel and the Lord. He sought God’s intervention and help in restoring that relationship by physically rebuilding the walls around the city and replacing the gates into the city. He based his petition on God’s promise to Israel before they ever entered the Promised Land that if they rebelled against Him, and He drove them out of the land, that He would one day restore them to the land if they would repent and serve Him. He prayed in faith that God would keep His promise and that God would use him to bring His promise to fruition. In **Nehemiah 1:11** **Nehemiah** prayed “**O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.’ For I was the king’s cupbearer.**” The **second chapter** of **Nehemiah** begins “**And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.**” It had been **four months** since **Nehemiah** had first received word concerning the desperate conditions in Jerusalem. It had been **four months** since he had “**sat down and wept, and mourned for many days... fasting and praying before the God of heaven.**” I believe that over the course of those four months Nehemiah had continued to pour his heart out before God on behalf of the exiles who had returned home to Jerusalem. I believe he continued to plead for God to act to restore the broken down walls and burned out gates and to use him in the process. Consequently, the event recorded in the opening verses of **Chapter 2** was the immediate follow-up to the prayer recorded in **1:11** that we read a moment ago. What is recorded in these verses reveals that Nehemiah not only petitioned God based on His promises but he also waited patiently (four months) for Him to answer. While he was waiting, however, he also began developing a plan of action based on God’s granting his petition. Again, this demonstrates praying in faith defined as “**trusting God to tell the truth and keep His promises.**” **Praying, waiting, and planning make up a faith-based strategy for being prepared for God to answer our petitions according to His promises. Praying, waiting, and planning means bringing an umbrella when you gather to pray for rain.**

- **Nehemiah pointedly prays for favor before King Artaxerxes.**
(As cupbearer to the king it was Nehemiah’s responsibility to taste any wine brought to the king and then pass it on to him. His position was one of honor and influence. It was one of familiarity as noted by the king’s noticing Nehemiah’s sadness before him. It is also significant to note that the king’s favor was needed because Artaxerxes had earlier in his reign decreed for all work on rebuilding the city of Jerusalem to cease. (**Ezra 4:21**) This decree was probably based on the need to focus on an Egyptian rebellion at that time. Whatever the reason, however, Nehemiah would be seeking permission to not only go and rebuild the city but also to seek the King’s withdrawal of his decree to cease the work in Jerusalem. It would seem that for four months Nehemiah was waiting for the opportune moment to approach the King.)

- **Nehemiah's demeanor drew the attention of the King.**
(**Verse 2** affirms the closeness of the relationship between the King and his cupbearer. How easy is it to be so engaged in our own world that we do not notice the demeanor of those around us? It is significant that the King was aware of those around him. He noted that something was troubling Nehemiah. It was the perfect opportunity for Nehemiah to approach the King so he seized it. Note that he seized it even though he was "dreadfully afraid.")
- **Nehemiah seizes the moment he had sought the Lord to create.**
(How often do we ask God to work and then fail to seize the opportunity when He does? God opens the door for Nehemiah to approach the King but he is "dreadfully afraid." Rather than let his fear paralyze him he chose to trust God concerning His granting him favor with the King. He backed up his prayer of faith by walking in faith! Notice that when Nehemiah reveals the reason for his sadness he does not mention Jerusalem by name but the King would have known nevertheless. "May the King live forever" was a common phrase in addressing a king. He clearly describes the condition of Jerusalem to the King. The King cuts to the heart of the matter and asks Nehemiah what he wants. Do not miss the significance of this conversation. It all points to the fact that God has given Nehemiah favor with the King. Also note that before Nehemiah answers him he stops to offer a quick prayer to the Lord. No doubt a silent prayer it nevertheless affirms that Nehemiah understands that this is a moment orchestrated by God and he must be in tune with Him!)
- **Nehemiah lays out his plan to the King.**
(He has prayed. He has waited. He has devised a plan based on God's fulfilling his promise to Israel. Notice the elements of the plan.
 - **First**, he asks the King to send him to Jerusalem which means leaving his position as the King's cupbearer.
 - **Second**, he asks for permission to rebuild the city which will necessitate the King withdrawing his decree to stop rebuilding the city.
 - **Third**, he seeks letters of safe conduct for the governors along the way.
 - **Fourth**, he asks for the necessary building materials he will need to rebuild the walls, replace the gates, and build himself a house.
 God had indeed granted him favor with the King. Artaxerxes grants him each request. We must not miss in **v. 8** the fact that Nehemiah attributes all of this to the "good hand of my God upon me." He had prayed, waited, planned, believed, and acted based on his faith that God tells the truth and keeps His promises. Notice also that even though he did not request it, the King sent troops with him to ensure his safety during the journey.)

CONCLUSION: Praying in faith means **praying with confidence** that God has told the truth about Himself, about His character, about His goodness, about the fact that He has a plan and purpose for our lives. It is praying believing that He will keep His promises. **Praying in faith also means that we wait for His answer.**

- **Psalm 37:7** – "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him."
- **Psalm 27:14** – "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!"
- **Psalm 130:5** – "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope."

Praying in faith also means being prepared for when He does answer. It means being ready to respond when the opportunity we have asked Him to create appears before us. It means having a plan ready to put into motion when the door we have prayed would open opens. Are you prepared for God to answer your prayers of faith? Are you prepared to seize the opportunities you have asked Him to create? Do you have a plan ready for when the door opens that you have asked Him to open? To pray in faith means to be prepared for His answer. Are you ready?

SUNDAY MORNING: NOVEMBER 1, 2015
TEXT: NEHEMIAH 2:9-20
TITLE: “A PLAN IS ONLY USEFUL IF YOU WORK IT”

INTRODUCTION: We discussed last week that **praying in faith** means **praying with confidence** that God has told the truth about Himself, about His character, about His goodness, as well as about the fact that He has a plan and purpose for our lives. It is praying believing that He will keep His promises. **Praying in faith also means that we wait for His answer.** Two verses I referenced concerning the value of waiting on the Lord were—**Psalm 27:14** – “Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!” **Psalm 130:5** – “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope.” I also noted that **praying in faith means being prepared for when God does answer.** It means **being ready to respond when the opportunity we have asked Him to create appears before us.** It means **having a plan ready to put into motion when the door we have prayed would open opens.** **Nehemiah did just that.** For **four months** after he first received word concerning the desperate conditions in Jerusalem he continued to plead with the Lord **to act to restore the broken down walls and burned out gates of the city.** He also, I believe, **prayed for God to use him in the process.** Nehemiah prayed and waited. And while he waited **he began developing a plan of action based on God’s granting his petition.** Consequently, I stated that **praying, waiting, and planning make up a faith-based strategy for being prepared for God to answer our petitions according to His promises.** However, **having a plan is of no value if you do not put that plan into motion.** Nehemiah’s plan had four major parts.

- **First**, he asks the King to send him to Jerusalem which means leaving his position as the King’s cupbearer.
- **Second**, he asks for permission to rebuild the city which will necessitate the King withdrawing his decree to stop rebuilding the city.
- **Third**, he seeks letters of safe conduct for the governors along the way.
- **Fourth**, he asks for the necessary building materials he will need to rebuild the walls, replace the gates, and build himself a house.

Again, laying out his plan to the king and having his plan accepted by the king still means little if he does not follow through with his plan. The initial step to his follow-through is recorded in **v. 9** – “Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.” Once Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem he continues to unfold his plan to rebuild the broken down walls and burned out gates of the city. It is significant to note, however, that from the beginning, there are those who will oppose this work of the Lord. **Verse 10** records “When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.” Their resistance will prove to be a threat to Nehemiah’s unfolding plan but it will be a resistance that he will meet with faith and wisdom. **Nehemiah’s story affirms a significant spiritual truth that I believe we need to grasp.** We have established the fact that **God always answers our prayers correctly.** Whatever the answer—yes, no, or not yet—the Lord is always correct when He answers. **Another fact that I believe we need to see is that God always answers our prayers in context.** God’s correct answers concerning our petitions are always related to His larger unfolding plan for drawing the world to Him. The significance of this is found in the fact that every door God opens creates opportunity in the present as well as opportunity for the future. When God gave Nehemiah “favor” with King Artaxerxes Nehemiah stepped through the open door and put forward the plan God had given him for rebuilding the walls and replacing the burned out gates in Jerusalem. Once he walked through that door and the King agreed to let him go he then had to follow-through. And once he got to Jerusalem he had to continue to follow-through even when he was met with resistance. Nehemiah’s original petition concerning Jerusalem was consistent with God’s plan revealed before Israel ever entered the Promised Land. Thus when he prayed according to God’s plan and purpose God responded positively. But that was just another step in God’s larger plan to bring Israel back to the Promised Land not just physically but also spiritually. Look at how God’s larger plan continues to unfold as Nehemiah’s story continues. **READ – Nehemiah 2:11-16.**

- **Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem.**

(Once he arrives in Jerusalem Nehemiah rests for three days before he takes his next step. He does not initially tell the leaders in Jerusalem his intentions. He will wait for the right moment and that moment will take place after he has had opportunity to examine the condition of the city. When Nehemiah first heard of Jerusalem’s condition it was described as being “in great distress and reproach.” (**Neh. 1:3**) When we examined that passage I noted that the word for “distress” is translated as “trouble” in the NIV and the term for “reproach” is translated “disgrace.” I stated that the best understanding would be that the people were “beside themselves” and had “wilted to a point of impotence.” They were stuck did not know how to move forward. Both the magnitude of what needs to be done and the opposition to doing it had them wringing their hands. Nehemiah wanted to assess the situation personally so he does so during the night. Afterwards he addresses the leaders and reveals his plans.)

- **Nehemiah reveals his plan to the leaders in Jerusalem.**
 (READ – vv. 17-18a—“You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach. And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me.” His **first step** is to identify with the people in Jerusalem. He is one of them even though he is “**new to town**.” He is in distress with them and his plan is to rebuild the wall along with them. **Second** he is realistic about the situation. “Distress” and “reproach” are the terms used when he first heard of the situation. Nehemiah had examined the walls and gates personally. **Very little is ever accomplished if realistic assessments are not made from the beginning**. The magnitude of the task was evident. Nehemiah did not hold back in his assessment. The **third** thing he did was call the leaders to join him in rebuilding the walls. He did not come to Jerusalem to tell them what they needed to do. He came to Jerusalem to join with them in what God wanted them to do. In calling them to action he points out the opportunity to no longer be a “reproach.” They would take another step in reestablishing their relationship with the Lord! The **fourth** thing he did was offer his own testimony concerning how God had been at work up to that point.)
- **The People respond to Nehemiah’s plan to rebuild the wall.**
 (**Verse 18b**—“So they said, ‘Let us rise up and build.’ Then they set their hands to this good work.” Inspired by the activity of God, the confidence of Nehemiah, and the permission of the king to begin rebuilding the people responded in earnest. As the story unfolds their commitment would be challenged. This would not be an easy task to accomplish but they would stay focused and would complete the project in just **fifty-two days**. As I have stated previously the task of rebuilding the walls would take less time than the task of rebuilding their relationship with the Lord.)

CONCLUSION: Let me reiterate at this point what I said earlier about Nehemiah’s story affirming a **significant spiritual truth that we need to grasp**. Once again, we have established the fact that God always answers our prayers correctly. Whatever the answer—yes, no, or not yet—the Lord is always correct when He answers. And once again, **I believe we need to see that God always answers our prayers in context**. God’s correct answers concerning our petitions are always related to His larger unfolding plan for drawing the world to Him. When we pray in faith we are praying with confidence that God has been truthful about Himself and He will be faithful to keep His promises. We are also submitting to waiting for His answer in His time. During that waiting period we have opportunity to prepare for whatever His answer might be by developing a plan to respond. In developing a plan for His answer we also position ourselves to fit into the larger context of what He is doing. **How often do we recognize the connection between how God answers our petitions and how His answer to us impacts His larger plan?** We are part of something bigger than ourselves. Everything He is doing in and through us fits into a larger context. Our obedience facilitates the obedience of others. It allows for a larger movement of His Spirit to take place. Let me challenge us to not only accept God’s answers to our petitions as always correct but also as always in context to what He is doing on a larger scale.