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Unit 1

OPENING THE DOOR TO AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE

Introduction and Overview

SCRIPTURE FOCUS OF MATERIAL

To establish and maintain a relationship with the Lord that results in a powerful and effective prayer life, we must learn from Jesus. The course will cover Jesus' teaching on prayer as he presented it—chronologically and sequentially. Step by step, he teaches how to build a solid foundation for a life of prayer that is rooted and grounded in a personal relationship with him.

Key scriptures will include—

Units 2-7: The Lord's Prayer, the model prayer of Matthew 6:9-13

Unit 8: Persistence, Luke 11, 18; the prayer promises of Matthew 18, Mark 11, John 14-16.

THE WORKBOOK IS DIVIDED INTO EIGHT SECTIONS.

Unit 1: Opening the Door to an Effective Prayer Life

Unit 2: Spending Time with God

Unit 3: Knowing the God We Worship

Unit 4: Yielding to God's Direction

Unit 5: Asking for God's Provision

Unit 6: Seeking God's Forgiveness

Unit 7: Trusting God's Protection

Unit 8: Expecting God's Response

EACH WEEKLY UNIT INCLUDES

A weekly lesson based on Jesus' teaching on prayer.

Five daily devotional studies.

“Food for Thought and Discussion” questions to be answered for group discussion.

NOTE: If you have a week in which you fall behind, come to the group discussion anyway! You will always have a review of the lesson on the video, which will prepare you to take part in the discussion—and you'll gain much by being there!

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What did Jim and Kaye Johns say in their testimony that you related to? In what way have you had similar feelings or experiences? How have they had an impact on your prayer life?
2. Think about someone you have known or known of, who has a powerful prayer life. It might be someone like Billy Graham or your pastor, or maybe someone you have known personally. Why do you consider them to be effective pray-ers?

Unit 2

SPENDING TIME WITH GOD

*Building Any Relationship Takes Time,
One on One.*

SCRIPTURE

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” [Matt. 6:6]

INSIGHTS FROM JESUS’ TEACHING ON PRAYER

Jesus is the one who teaches us how to pray. In the Old Testament we are given many examples of prayers, but no specific instructions or guidelines for prayer. Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, began teaching his disciples how to pray. He did it in a sequential way, giving them the step-by-step essentials for building a solid foundation for a life of prayer—

- The importance of the quiet time... [Matt. 6:6]
- The need to be focused in prayer... [Matt. 6:7]
- How to pray, a pattern for prayer... [Matt. 6:9-13]
- Caution on unforgiveness... [Matt. 6:14-15]
- Encouragement to ask, seek, knock... [Matt. 7:7-8]
- Affirmation of God’s nature and desire to give... [Matt. 7:9-11]

Later by perhaps several months—

- Agreeing with others in prayer... [Matt. 18:19]

Once we have learned and are practicing the basics of prayer, we are led into the early stages of our personal relationship with God. As we grow in our understanding of him, as we begin to experience his faithfulness, we are ready for some of Jesus’ more advanced teaching about prayer—

- Persistence in prayer... [Luke 11:5-8]
- Asking for the Holy Spirit... [Luke 11:13]
- Always praying and not giving up... [Luke 18:1]
- Being bold in our prayers... [Luke 18:2-5]
- Crying out to him day and night... [Luke 18:7]

Finally, at the end of his ministry, Jesus left us many incredible prayer promises, originally given to his 12 disciples and underscored by the Apostle John in his epistle, 1 John. These are not promises for casual Christians, but for those today who have walked with him, who know the cost of following him, who are willing to deny self and “abide in the Vine.” [John 15:7] These promises tell us we may have *whatever we ask, if*—each promise has a condition. The conditions include—

Unit 2

SPENDING TIME WITH GOD

Continued...

have hearts that do not condemn us...*[1 John 3:21]*
live as obedient and pleasing to the Lord...*[1 John 3:22]*
pray according to his will... *[1 John 5:14-15]*

There are no shortcuts to the prayer promises Jesus gave his disciples in his last hours with them. Jesus taught them about prayer step-by-step, and that is how we are to master prayer. Those who are just beginning to have a consistent prayer life, and to discover how to walk daily in God's presence, are not yet ready to persist in prayer, to come boldly and courageously before the throne. That faith, that confidence, takes time to develop.

Jesus teaches us to begin with the basics, to lay a strong foundation for our prayer lives. The first step is to have a daily quiet time, out of which we are able to know God personally and to seek his empowerment to live the life we must live if we want him to hear and answer our prayers in a powerful way.

GIVING GOD UNDIVIDED TIME AND ATTENTION

Jesus' first teaching on prayer precedes the Lord's Prayer, or model prayer, of Matthew 6. He said to his disciples "...go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." *[Matt. 6:6]*

These verses do not say go "daily," but his model prayer, which immediately follows, includes "give us *this day* our *daily* bread." *[Matt. 6:11, emphasis added]* It is important to set aside time daily with God, time in which we focus on prayer and reading the Bible, time when we are not trying to think about or do anything else. We call this our daily "quiet time," though others may refer to it as their "morning watch," or something similar. It is in such a time that our personal relationship with God develops, that we learn to hear his voice—not audibly, but certainly.

It is in our daily quiet time that God becomes a real person to us and that we develop the sensitivity to recognize his presence with us as we move through the day. We can pray without having a consistent quiet time, but we cannot know him in a personal way without it. If at any time we realize we are not sensing God's presence in our lives, we must come back to this first, essential step that Jesus taught and ask ourselves—are we spending meaningful time every day with God? Are we giving God undivided time and attention?

Unit Two: Day One

IS IT EVER TOO LATE TO LEARN TO PRAY?

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him...
Abram fell face down. [Gen. 17:1,3]*

Is it ever too late to learn to *really* pray, in such a way that you know you have connected with God, to see answers to your prayers? Of course it is never too late! I'm one who did not learn to pray, who did not even know the fundamentals of prayer, until I was 46 years old. In 1988 my husband, Jim, and I, although we had regularly attended church in the past, had not been in church for two years. Friends visiting from out of town prompted us to visit a church we had never been to, and the timing was the Lord's—a 13-week course in prayer was being offered at the church, and we enrolled.

In that course, I felt I was out of my league. I had never read the Bible. I had never memorized scripture. I had never prayed aloud, except to read prayers in unison with a group—or to bless the food before we ate. I had never prayed with anyone other than very young children. I had never prayed on a consistent basis. But God took me where I was, and began to bring me to where he wants me to be. Every day is a new experience with him. Every day he draws me closer.

That prayer course was the beginning of the greatest discovery of my life—that our God is real and personal, that he wants us to know him in an intimate way, that he will teach us to pray in order that we can. No matter where you are in your Christian experience, no matter what your age, God is waiting for you, to draw you closer, to change your life through prayer.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. In what way have you ever been intimidated by others who knew more about prayer, or the Bible, or about God than you did?

2. In what ways have you grown in your prayer life, in your understanding of the Bible or in your experience with God over the past few years? As you think about it, if you conclude that you are too new or inexperienced as a Christian to respond, in what way would you like to grow in these areas over the next few weeks of this course?

3. In what ways would you like God to be more real to you today?

One of the beautiful truths of our experience with God is that the more we know of him, the better we want to know him. The better we learn to know him, the more time we want to spend with him. There is always more to know and experience of him, always another part of his nature to love.

Unit Two: Day Two
INFORMATION—OR A RELATIONSHIP?

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. [1 Sam. 3:7]

There were times in my life when I went to early morning church services every day for weeks—but I realize now, I did not know God personally. I did not even know that I could. It is easy to learn *about* God without knowing him, just as we can learn about the President without being personally acquainted. We can become experts, quoting Bible verses, giving all the right answers, all without having a personal relationship with God.

I used to wonder about that. When I would hear people say they had a personal relationship with God, I didn't know whether to believe them or not. But I have learned that it is true, and it does not just happen. Building a relationship with God takes effort and energy, just like relationships with people. It takes time spent alone with him every day in prayer and in his Word, the Bible.

The trouble is that many people never really learn to pray or develop the discipline to do it consistently. It isn't that they can't pray at all, but their prayers never seem to go beyond an elementary level—and that limits their experience with God. They never discover that he is willing to reveal himself to them.

Even Jesus' disciples realized they needed to be taught to pray, and they asked for help [Luke 11:1]. So must we, for when we do, we find he is more than willing to teach us what we need to know.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Date _____

1. In what ways do you think living in a personal relationship with God is different from knowing scripture?

2. How do you think understanding the Bible might relate to knowing God in a personal way?

3. How important is discipline to our prayer lives? Is there an area of discipline in your prayer life with which you are struggling today (e.g. finding time to pray)? Or, that you have managed to conquer in God's strength? What is it?

A friend of ours realized he had to choose: either his favorite evening sports round up, which was on TV from 11:00-12:00 midnight, or his early morning quiet time—because he couldn't get up early enough for a meaningful quiet time if he stayed up until midnight. He learned to live without the sports report, and drew much closer to God.