



Faith Module

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We Were All Fish Once

Go Fish Series

Session 1: We Were All Fish Once (43 minutes)

Presenter: Andy Stanley

www.rightnowmedia.org

Synopsis of the Faith Module: In this Module, we will focus on the spiritual disciplines of personal evangelism, Bible study, prayer, and fasting. The following lessons are both biblical and intensely practical. These truths form the foundation of the spiritual life of the man of God. We could cut some corners in life and get by with it but not with the spiritual disciplines. They are some of the “BIG” rocks we must put into the jar first!

Synopsis of this Session: In this session, Andy Stanley reviews the calling of the first four of Jesus’ disciples: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John. He points out that although they have been fishermen all their lives—Jesus was now calling them to become “fishers of men.” The calling issued by Jesus to these 1st century men is the same calling that Jesus issues to 21st century men. Why? Because men and women, no matter what century they live in, need to trust Jesus as their personal Savior.

Introduction

The following text records the calling of the first four of Jesus’ disciples:

“After John [the Baptist] was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’ ¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.” (Mk. 1:14-20 NIV)

What do we learn from this passage of Scripture?

Fishing For Men

Take note that when Jesus spoke to these four men, he stated his agenda right up front. Mark records Jesus saying to his prospective disciples, “Come, follow me, and I will make you _____ of men.” (Mk. 1:17 NIV) In his gospel, Mark uses the word “follow” as a reference to discipleship. (cf. Mk. 1:17; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21) Jesus invited Peter, Andrew, James, and John to become his disciples—to “follow” his example.

In Luke’s account of the calling of the disciples, Jesus stated, “From now on you will catch _____.” (Lk. 5:10 NIV) As the New Testament unfolds, we learn that these four disciples, as well as other disciples who were later called to follow Christ, became just that—“fishers of men.” They learned that to “follow” is to “_____.”

Today, 20 centuries later, and living on the other side of the world, we are saved because millions of believers who came before us understood that to “follow” Jesus meant to “fish.” **Why do people follow Jesus? Why did you become a Christ follower?**

Who Are Fishers of Men?

One of the underlying themes of the scriptures is that God has always used all _____ of people as fishers of men. Among the original 12 disciples there were 4 fishermen (Mk. 1:14-20) and a tax collector. (cf. Matt. 9:9; 10:3) Among the other

disciples, was a demon possessed man (Mk. 5:1-20), an immoral woman (Jn. 4:7-42), a Roman centurion (cf. Matt. 8:5-13; 27:54), Pharisees (cf. Matt. 27:57; Jn. 19:38-39), etc.

Jesus' goal for his followers in the 1st century—as well as the 21st century, is the same—“Come, follow me, and I will make **you** fishers of men.” (Mk. 1:17 NIV)

God uses the temporal things of life to bring about _____ from our lives. God can use a believer's life story (failures & successes, problems successfully overcome, stage of life, etc.) to reach an unbeliever with the gospel who has a similar life story. The end result is that if they trust Christ as their Savior, they will ultimately live in the presence of God for eternity.

Do you think that it is easier to “fish” if you are a _____? Most people might think so for the very simple reason that ministers know the Bible better than they do. The simple truth is that when it comes to “fishing for men,” it is **not** advantageous to be a minister. **Why would we say that?**

Surprisingly, it is actually much easier to “fish” if you are a _____. **Why would we say this?**

To summarize, God uses the gospel message, and the life experiences of the messenger, combined with a unique set of _____ in the life of the unbeliever, to bring them to Christ.

May we be more than just “followers” of Christ. Let us also be “fishers” of men. People are counting on us. Do not let them down for the cost of a Christless life is a Christless eternity!

Personal Questions

1. **What are some excuses you have used not to fish for men?**

2. **Who did God use to bring you to Christ?**

- 3. Who is a person(s) presently in your “pond” that God can use you to reach with the gospel?**

- 4. Why are new Christians more effective witnesses?**

We Were All Fish Once



Evangelism Tool #1

DO

- Religion is spelled **DO**. Do this, do that, do something.
- All false religions and cults teach that followers must do noble deeds to appease their deity.

DONE

- Christianity is spelled **DONE**.
- Christianity is the only major world religion that is **not** spelled “DO.”
- The premise of Christianity is that Jesus died for fallen people and did for them what they could not do for themselves. Anyone can receive the benefit of Christ’s redemptive work by simply asking him for forgiveness.
- Christianity is **not** a religion—it is a personal relationship with God the Father, thru the sacrificial death of God the Son, and the saving work of God the Holy Spirit.

Lesson Follow-up

◆ **Learn the two diagnostic questions used in *Evangelism Explosion*:**

1. “Have you come to a place in your spiritual life where you know for certain you have eternal life, or is that something you would say you are still working on?” (On a scale of 1-10, how sure are you that you would go to heaven?)
2. “Suppose you were to die tonight and stand before God, and He were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ What would you say?”

◆ **Learn the Do / Done evangelism tool.**

◆ **Write a letter to the person who introduced you to Christ. Express your gratitude for telling you about the Savior, tell them about your family, how God is using you today in the lives of other people, etc.**

We realize that there could be circumstances that hinder your ability to send them this letter of appreciation, but if it is possible, please send the letter.

◆ **We encourage to commit to praying daily the following things:**

- Pray that God would use you to be a “fisher of men.”
- Pray that daily you will recognize the divine appointments to “fish.”
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would enable you to speak God’s word with boldness. (Acts 4:29)
- Pray that the lost might be saved.

In conclusion, let us ask, “If God saved every lost person you prayed for today—how many people would be saved?”



Why Fish?

Go Fish Series

Session 2: Why Fish? (41 minutes)

Presenter: Andy Stanley

www.rightnowmedia.org

Synopsis of this Session: In this session, Andy Stanley answers the question, “Why Fish.” Why are we commanded to share the gospel message of salvation with all men? The simple answer is that all men are sinners, separated from the life of God, and on their way to an eternity separated from God. Secondly, Jesus is the only Savior of mankind. There are **not** many ways to heaven—there is only one way and it is through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why we fish!

Review

In our last session, we studied the calling the first four of Jesus’ twelve disciples—Peter, Andrew, James, and John. (Mk. 1:14-20) Mark records Jesus saying to the potential disciples, “Come, follow me, and I will make you _____ of men.” (Mk. 1:17 NIV) In other words, if these men “followed” Jesus, he would change them into something that they were presently not—into “fishers of _____.” Jesus was going to teach the disciples how to bring others into a personal and saving relationship with himself. The principle that was emphasized in our last session was that to “follow” Christ was to “_____.”

The question we want to answer today’s lesson is, “_____?” Primarily, we “fish” because God commands us to become “fishers of men.” We need no other reason than this.

Believers often offer excuses as to why people should **not** become “fishers of men.” **In our politically correct society, it is not uncommon to hear objections such as:**

- ◆ Why can't we let everyone just make up their own minds about spiritual things?
- ◆ Aren't all gods basically the same god only known by a different name?
- ◆ Isn't one religion as good as another religion?
- ◆ Aren't all religions basically the same and leading to the same place?
- ◆ Aren't we arrogant to think that Christianity is the only way to heaven?
- ◆ Most religions are not proselytizing others to join their religion—so why should we?
- ◆ Religion and politics are controversial subjects that should be avoided.
- ◆ Isn't it enough to be sincere?

In this lesson, we will explain why believers have an inner compulsion to tell other people about Jesus. Why believers cannot be content to let everyone believe what they want to believe.

Introduction

Today, we want to look at two of the first four disciples Jesus called to follow him—_____ and _____. We now want to move forward approximately 3½ years from the calling to an event that occurred after Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension back to heaven.

Luke records the story of the healing of a man who was lame from birth:

“One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, ‘Look at us!’ ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. ⁶ Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While the

beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them ..." (Acts 3:1-11 NIV)

When Peter saw that a crowd had gathered, he began to preach to them (Acts 3:12-26). While Peter was speaking, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees approached and heard Peter mention the name of Jesus and declare that he had been resurrected from the dead. The Jewish religious leaders were angry that Peter had the audacity to talk about Jesus in the Temple complex. (Acts 4:1-2) The Jewish religious authorities were so incensed that they arrested Peter and John and put them in jail overnight. (Acts 4:3)

Telling Others What We Have "Seen" And "Heard"

The next day, the Jewish rulers, elders, and teachers of the law assembled and Peter and John were brought before them to be questioned concerning by whose authority they had healed the lame man. (Acts 4:7) Peter took advantage of the opportunity to preach a mini sermon (only 117 words) to the Jewish religious authorities. (Acts 4:8-12)

After Peter finished his sermon, both he and John were escorted from the room. (Acts 4:15) At that time, the Jewish religious authorities discussed what they should do with these two Galilean evangelists. They concluded that they could actually do truly little because everyone in Jerusalem knew that the lame man had been healed. (Acts 4:13-16) So, they decided to "warn these men to _____ no longer to anyone in this name." (Acts 4:17 NIV)

Luke writes:

"Then **they** [the Jewish religious leaders] called them [Peter & John] in again and **commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.** ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have _____ **and** _____.'" (Acts 4:18-20 NIV)

Peter and John proclaimed that they could **not** quit speaking about Jesus because they have "seen" something and they have "heard" something. In essence, Peter declared:

We saw Christ crucified, we saw him buried, we saw the empty tomb, we saw the risen Savior, and we saw him ascend back to his Father in heaven! We witnessed events that transformed our lives for time and eternity! John and I are **not** going to be silenced because we can't keep quiet, we are called by God to be "fishers of men," and we are going to keep on "fishing."

Fulfilling Bible Prophecy

Now let's retrace our steps for a moment and return to verse 5:

“The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and the other men of the high priest's family. [the Who's Who of the Jews were in attendance!] ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’ [the religious leaders could not deny that a miracle was performed. The man who had been healed was standing in front of them—vs. 14] ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name [authority or power] of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you [the religious leaders of Israel] crucified [murdered] but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He [Jesus] is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.” [a quote from Ps. 118:22] (Acts 4:5-11 NIV)

When they were children, the religious leaders of Israel had memorized Ps. 118:22. They knew that this was a promise concerning the coming Messiah who when he came, would not be recognized by everyone. The psalmist compares the future rejection of the Messiah as a builder who is searching through a pile of stones from which he will construct a building. He picks up one stone, and after examining it, discards it into the rubbish heap. The psalmist stated that the very stone that the builders rejected God will fashion into the _____—the most important stone in the entire building.

But who would reject the Messiah? Peter told the religious Jewish religious leaders that they were the very ones the psalmist spoke about—those who rejected the Messiah. Peter was literally telling the religious leaders of Israel:

You men are the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy! You have discarded God's cornerstone on whom everything God is going to do from this point forward in history will be built! All of your lives you have wondered who would be so stupid to reject the Messiah. Who would be so blind not to recognize him? Who would be so arrogant to think they did not need him? Congratulations guys—you are the very ones!

Salvation Is Found In Only One Person—Jesus Christ!

And then Peter declared:

“Salvation [**deliverance from the penalty of our sin**] is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men [**Jesus Christ**] by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12 NIV)

There are **not** many ways to God—there is only one way! All religions do **not** lead to the same place! There is only one name that saves a man from the penalty of his sins—the name “Jesus!” (cf. Jn. 3:36; 1 Tim. 2:5) In this verse, Peter gave what amounted to a direct invitation for the members of the Sanhedrin to repent and trust Christ as their personal Savior.

The Greek word translated as “healed” in Acts 4:9 refers to the physical healing of the lame man. This same Greek word is translated as “saved” in Acts 4:12 and refers to the spiritual healing of the soul of those who trust Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Peter was literally saying that just as there is no other name by which diseased bodies can be cured (cf. Acts 3:1-10; 4:7)—there is no other name by which sinful souls can be saved!

Conclusion

So why do we “fish?” We “fish” because:

- ◆ The message of salvation is **not** an intuitive message that you can discover on your own. Therefore, if we don’t take the gospel message to a lost and dying world—they won’t know of the saving power of Christ.
- ◆ Salvation by grace thru faith in the shed blood of Christ (cf. Jn. 3:16; Eph. 2:8,9; Titus 3:5) is a matter of divine revelation—the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the unbeliever. (cf. Jn. 3:5-8; 6:63; 14:17; 15:26; 16:7-11,13; 2 Cor. 4:4; Titus 3:5; Rev. 22:17) In order for you to have been saved, someone had to tell you about Christ’s virgin birth, sinless life, sacrificial death on the cross, bodily resurrection from the grave, and his ascension back to the Father in heaven. Others are depending on you to tell them of the saving work of Jesus Christ!

Discussion Questions

1. How did Peter and John respond when commanded by “religious people” not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus?

- 2. How is this attitude toward Peter and John similar to the world's attitude toward Christians today?**

- 3. Peter and John responded by saying that they could not stop talking about what they had "seen and heard." What is significant about their response?**

- 4. As Christians, we believe there was a monumental event that happened in history that changed the world forever. It caused the disciples to give their lives without reservation. What was that event? How has that event impacted your personal life?**

- 5. Why was it that Peter and John could not be quiet?**

- 6. Why can't we just let everyone believe what they want to believe and not bother them?**

Why Fish?

Lesson Follow-up

- ◆ **If you have not already done so, learn the two diagnostic questions used in *Evangelism Explosion*:**
 1. “Have you come to a place in your spiritual life where you know for certain you have eternal life, or is that something you would say you are still working on?” (On a scale of 1-10, how sure are you that you would go to heaven?)
 2. “Suppose you were to die tonight and stand before God, and He were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ What would you say?”
- ◆ Learn the Do / Done evangelism tool.
- ◆ If you have not already done so, write a letter to the person who introduced you to Christ. Express your gratitude for telling you about the Savior, tell them about your family, how God is using you today in the lives of other people, etc. We realize that there could be circumstances that hinder your ability to send them this letter of appreciation, but if it is possible, please send the letter.



Muddy Water

Go Fish Series

Session 5: Muddy Water (41 minutes)

Presenter: Andy Stanley

www.rightnowmedia.org

Synopsis of this Session: In this session, Andy Stanley uses what may very well be the most famous verse in the Bible, as a template to aid the believer in sharing the life-changing Gospel of Christ. In short, the message of John 3:16 is God Loved ... God Gave ... We Believe ... We Receive.

Review

In this series of messages, Andy Stanley has emphasized that when Christ called his disciples, he said, “Come, follow me, and I will make you _____ of men.” (Mk. 1:17 NIV) In other words, if these men followed Jesus, he would change them into something that they were presently not—into “fishers of men.” In his gospel, Mark uses the word “follow” as a reference to discipleship (cf. Mk. 2:14; 8:34; 10:21). A disciple is one whose life is characterized by “following” Jesus and “fishing for men.” In short, to “follow” Christ is to “fish.” In today’s vernacular, you and I cannot outsource our responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission to someone else.

Introduction

Many of us are afraid to talk to others about Jesus and one of the reasons we are afraid to share the gospel is that both preachers and Christians have made fishing too

complicated. Using the analogy of fishing, we have “muddied” the water in the fishing hole. But the truth is that the gospel is not complicated and fishing for men and women is not complicated either.

There are people who have rejected Christianity who really do not know enough truth about it to reject it. We think it is within the realm of possibility that many people are actually rejecting caricatures or distortions of biblical Christianity. **Can you think of any criticisms leveled at Christianity that are not correct?**

The purpose of this lesson is to uncomplicated the gospel so that when someone asks you “**how**” to become a Christian or what does it “**mean**” to be a Christian—you will be able to answer their questions clearly and effectively. In this lesson, we want to answer the following two questions which we believe will help you uncomplicated the gospel message:

1. What does a person need to _____ to become a Christian?
2. What does a person need to _____ to become a Christian?

The good news is that no matter what a person’s nationality, what language they speak, whether they are male or female, young or old—everyone becomes a Christian the same way.

Sharing the Gospel

In this lesson, we want to unpack the most famous verse in the Bible in a simple way so that for the rest of your life you will be able to share the gospel simply and effectively and answer the two questions—What does a person need to “know” to be a Christian and what does a person need to “do” to become a Christian.

You do not become a Christian by:

- ◆ Attending church.
- ◆ Saying a prayer.
- ◆ Doing good works (cf. Romans 3:24; 4:4-5; 11:5,6; Eph. 2:8,9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:4,5).

The Bible says that you and I have absolutely **zero** righteousness to offer God. The prophet Isaiah wrote these words:

“All of us [**every single person**] have become like one who is unclean [**spiritually out of fellowship with God**], and **all our righteous acts** [**obedient acts that are in harmony to God’s moral law**] **are like filthy rags**” [**the bandages that wrapped the open, running sores of a leper or menstrual cloths**] (Is. 64:6 KJV)

This is **not** a very flattering view of our best works offered to Christ!

So then, how do you become a Christian? Jesus answered this question in what is possibly the most famous verse in the Bible:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:16 NIV)

In John 3:16, we want to emphasize four words:

1. “For God so _____ the world ...”

God was not angry or upset with the world. If he were, he would have ignored the world. The verse does not read, “For God so ignored the world that he didn’t give them a single thing.”

God loves you because you and I because we were created as a reflection of his image.

2. “... that He _____ his one and only Son.”

God did what loving people do—he gave. People in “love” give gifts to those they love.

To become a Christian, we only have to “*know*” two things:

- ◆ God “loved”—“God so loved the world” which includes you!
- ◆ God “gave”—God “gave his ... Son” to die for the penalty of your sins.

3. “... that whoever _____ in him shall not perish.”

To become a Christian, we only have to “do” one thing—“believe in” God’s Son Jesus. What does it mean to “believe in?” The phrase “believe in” means two things in the Greek language of the New Testament:

- ◆ **To “trust.”**
 - By “trust” the Bible means that we trust Jesus, and Jesus alone, for our personal salvation.
- ◆ **To “commit.”**
 - To “commit” your soul to Christ believing that he can safely take care of it.

4. "... but _____ eternal life."

Jesus then explained that God's gift to us is "eternal life." "Eternal life" is **not** a reference to living forever as everybody will live somewhere forever—in heaven or hell. Eternal life is **not** a "quantity" of life but actually a "quality" of life that we "have" now (present tense —Jn. 10:10) and will enjoy forever.

People wonder in their heart of hearts what will happen after they die. We all know what will happen to our bodies when we die but we wonder what will happen to the real me—my spirit or soul. The Bible assures us that if we trust Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, our soul will depart this life and immediately enter into the presence of God in heaven. (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8-9; Phil. 1:21,23; 1 Thess. 4:13-14)

We can summarize what we have to "know" to become a Christian and what we need to "do" to become a Christian in this simple statement:

God Loved ... God Gave ... We Believe ... We Receive

Even though the Bible can be complicated—salvation is not. Now, let us notice what Jesus said in the next verse of Scripture:

"For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (Jn. 3:17 NIV)

Jesus did **not** leave heaven and come to planet earth to "_____ the world"—the world was already condemned. (Jn. 3:18) Jesus came because he was concerned about the spiritual condition of humanity and wanted to do something about it.

People will not spend eternity separated from God because of sin—there is a cure for sin. People spend eternity separated from God because they have **not** believed and received the free gift of eternal life. It has been correctly stated, "You don't go to heaven because of what you did. You go to heaven because of what Jesus did. People don't go to hell because of what they did. They go to hell because of what they didn't do—they didn't trust Jesus Christ as their personal Savior."

Conclusion

Our responsibility to both God and man after we have been saved is:

1. **Live** the gospel out by our example.
2. **Lay** the gospel out by our words.

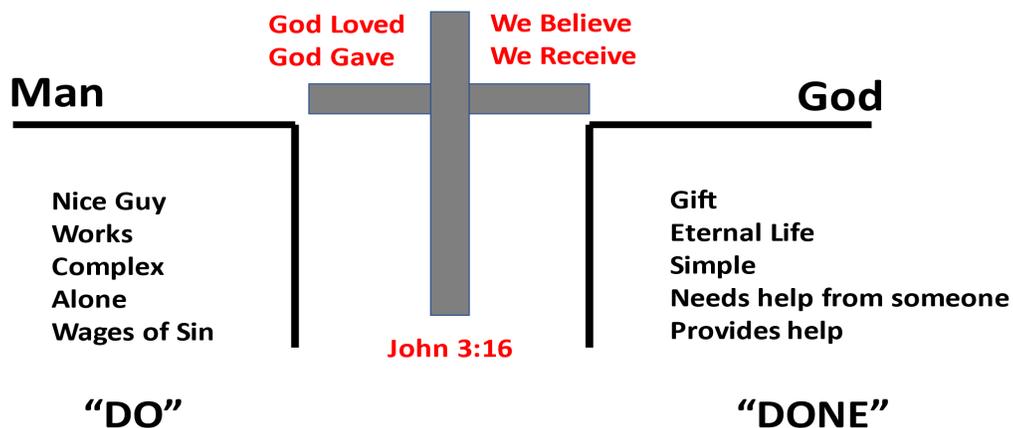
Muddy Water

Lesson Follow-up

- ◆ Learn the Bridge of Grace evangelism tool.



Personal Evangelism Tool #2



Every other “religion” gets you to this exact same spot.

Only **Christianity**, and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, get you here.

On one side of a gorge is where man is standing. On the other side of the gorge, is where God is standing. Between man and God is a great gap representing our sin that has separated us from a holy God. Although man continually attempts to build his own bridges from himself to God with his man-made religions and self-efforts—the gap is so wide that man cannot cross over to where God is. What we need is a bridge from sinful man to a holy God.

God used the wood of the cross to build a bridge across the gorge of sin so that men might have the opportunity to be forgiven of their sins, and at the moment of their death,

enter into his presence. Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay our sin debt which in fact becomes the bridge—the only way to God.



Bible Study Fundamentals

The material in this lesson is taken from the book *How to Study the Bible* by Dr. Tim LaHaye, from the book *How to Study Your Bible: Discover the Life-Changing Approach to God's Word* by Kay Arthur, and from the writings of Jeff Swart.

Synopsis of this Session: Our goal for this session is to teach you several practical methods that can be used to consistently read the Bible. Secondly, we will introduce you to the Inductive Method of Bible study. By making Observations about a text of Scripture, then Interpreting the verse of Scripture, you can make the Application of the scripture to your own personal life. And finally, we will suggest several tools that can make your Bible study more fruitful.

Introduction

The English word “Bible” is taken from the Greek word biblos (**bib**-los) and simply means “the book.” The Bible is divided into two major divisions: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word “testament” refers to a “covenant,” “promise,” or “agreement” between God and man.

George Mueller made this astute observation, “The vigor [**strength**] of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the word of God in our lives and thoughts.” In other words, we will be no more spiritual than the place we allow the word of God to have in our life.

How the Word of God Is Organized

The Bible is divided into two major divisions:

1. The Old Testament.

The Old Testament begins with the story of the creation of the world and records the history of the Jewish people to within 400 years of the birth of Christ. The Old Testament contains thirty-nine individual books, written by twenty-eight different authors over a period of 1,600 years (1967 B.C.–430 B.C.). The time span covered by the Old Testament is about 4,000 years (3975 B.C.–430 B.C.).

The 39 books of the Old Testament are grouped as:

- Creation – Genesis
- The Law – Exodus through Deuteronomy
- History of Israel – Joshua through Esther
- Wisdom/Poetry – Job through Song of Solomon
- Major Prophets – Isaiah through Daniel
- Minor Prophets – Hosea through Malachi

2. The Intertestamental Period.

The Intertestamental Period was a 400-year period between the Old and New Testaments (430 B.C.–5 B.C.) when God was silent in the sense that there was not a prophet in Israel proclaiming God's word to God's people.

3. The New Testament.

The New Testament begins with the story of Jesus' birth and details his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The rest of the New Testament tells the story of the ministry of Jesus' disciples who carried on Jesus' ministry after he departed for heaven.

The New Testament is composed of twenty-seven books, written by nine different authors over a period of fifty years (A.D. 44–96). The time span covered by the New Testament is about one hundred years (5 B.C.–A.D. 96)

The 27 books of the New Testament are grouped as:

- Gospels – Matthew through John
- Church History – Acts
- Paul's Epistles – Romans through Philemon
- General Epistles – Hebrews through Jude
- Prophecy – Revelation

What Bible Study Will Do For You

According to Dr. Tim LaHaye, a believer receives the following benefits when studying the Bible:

- ◆ It will make you a **strong** Christian. (cf. Ro. 10:17; 1 Jn. 2:14)
- ◆ It will **assure** you of your salvation. (1 Jn. 5:13)
- ◆ It will give you **confidence** and power in prayer. (cf. Jn. 15:7; 1 Jn. 5:14,15)
- ◆ It will **cleanse** your life from sin. (cf. Jn. 15:3; 17:17)
- ◆ It will give you **joy**. (Jn. 15:11)
- ◆ It will produce **peace** in your life. (Jn. 16:33)
- ◆ It will **guide** you in making important decisions. To know the will of God we must know the word of God. God's will never contradict his Word. (Ps. 119:105)
- ◆ It will enable you to **articulate** your faith. (1 Pet. 3:15) We witness from the overflow of God's Word.
- ◆ It will guarantee your **success**. (cf. Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-3)

How to Read the Bible

Spiritually mature believers read the Bible every day. The Apostle Paul even commended the Bereans for their daily intake of the Scriptures:

“Now these Jews [**the saints in Berea**] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they **received the word [of God]** with all eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily** to see if these things were so.” [**the things taught by the Apostle Paul**] (Acts 17:11 ESV)

We have all been taught that we should read the Bible, but many of us do not know where to begin. **There are several ways we would suggest that you read the Bible:**

1. Reading the Bible Through Once Each year.

There are several options for reading the entire Bible in one year:

- Read three chapters a day.

The simplest Bible reading plan is to read three chapters a day and five on Sunday and you will finish the entire Bible in a year. (362 days) We suggest that you read an entire book from the Old Testament and when you finish it, alternate to the New Testament.

- Use *The One-Year Bible* or the *You-Version Bible App*.

You can purchase *The One-Year Bible* where Scripture readings from both the Old and New Testament are arranged together for every day of the year so that you will read the entire Bible in a year.

The best way for most people to read the Bible is to set up a daily Bible reading plan on the *You Version Bible* app. The app is free from the app store and offers multiple daily Bible reading plans. The advantage of this app is that it goes everywhere you go and automatically keeps track where you need to read each day.

2. Reading Psalms and Proverbs.

We suggest that several times each year you read five Psalms (Day one: Psalms 1-5; Day two: Psalms 6-10; Day three: Psalms 11-15, etc.) every morning. If you read according to this plan, you will finish the Psalms in thirty days. If you would like to start your day on a positive note, read the Psalms.

At the same time that you read the psalms in the morning, read one chapter from the book of Proverbs in the evening. Because there are thirty-one chapters in the book of Proverbs, you can finish it once a month also. The value of the book of Proverbs is that it provides spiritual wisdom for earthly living.

3. Reading the Bible topically.

If you have a topical Bible, you can easily discover what God says about almost any subject. Pick a topic and read the verses that are catalogued under the subject you desire to learn more about.

4. Reading to Learn and remember.

Although we support the idea of reading the Bible each year—we have observed that a believer's knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures does **not** necessarily increase. The reason is that some books of the Bible are not meant to simply be read—they are meant to be studied (i.e., Leviticus). Therefore, as you read the Bible, you should read it in a way that you will remember it—by repetition. Start with a small book like 1 John and read it once a day for thirty days. After thirty days, you will know the content of 1 John very well.

Break the longer books into segments. For example, the Gospel of John, which contains twenty-one chapters, can be broken into three sections of seven chapters each (*Chapters 1-7; 8-14; 15-21*). By reading the book of John this way, in ninety days, you will actually have read John's Gospel thirty times. Reading in this manner, in 46 months you will have read the entire New Testament thirty times and know its content well.

5. Other Suggestions Concerning Reading the Bible.

We would like to make the following additional suggestions concerning reading the Bible:

- Set a regular **time** to read the scriptures every day. In other words, put God on your daily appointment calendar and keep your appointment.
- Set a regular **place** to read the scriptures.
- Read the scriptures with a notebook and pen to **record** what the Holy Spirit is saying to you through the Word.
- **Pray** the Scriptures.

Praying the Scriptures from the book of Psalms can be a spiritual blessing. Read a single verse of Scripture, discern what the verse is saying, and then turn what is said into a prayer for your own life. For example, the psalmist said:

“Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.” (Ps. 115:1)

Converting this verse of scripture into a personal prayer might look like this:

Lord, I don't want people to know me; I want them to know you. I don't want them to know my name; I want them to know your name. I don't want them to know what I have done; I want them to know what you have done. I don't want them to give me the glory; I want them to give You the glory! I want them to know of your love and faithfulness. Please answer this my prayer for the glory of your name!

- Keep a daily spiritual diary/journal and include:
 - God's personal message to you today.
 - A promise from God.
 - A command to keep.
 - A timeless spiritual principle to order your life by.
 - Application of God's truth to your life.

6. Concerning reading the Bible—be disciplined.

- Read the Bible daily when you feel like it and when you don't.
- Make a sacred vow to God—No Bible, no breakfast.
- Allow for no exceptions.

Before You Begin Studying The Scriptures

Whenever you read or study the scriptures, you must begin with prayer. Because the Bible is a spiritual book, written by a spiritual being, we must ask the author to illuminate the text to us (Lk. 24:45). Perhaps we need to pray like the Psalmist, “Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Ps. 119:18 ESV) or like young Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam. 3:9 NIV). Jesus stated that the one who guides us into all truth, the one who reveals the truth of scripture to us, is

the Holy Spirit, our resident teacher. (1 Jn. 2:27) Therefore, begin all Bible reading or Bible study with a prayer for illumination.

How to Study the Bible

We believe that the best way to study the Scriptures is by using the *Inductive Bible Study Method* (For a detailed explanation of the *Inductive Method of Bible study*, we highly recommend Kay Arthur's book entitled, *How to Study Your Bible: Discover the Life-Changing Approach to God's Word*). The *Inductive Method* of studying the Bible uses the Bible itself as the primary source of information about the Bible.

An Inductive Bible Study consists of three component parts:

1. Observation.

Observation answers the question, "What does the passage say?"

- **Learn to ask questions.**

To get the whole story, journalists are taught to ask the "5 W's and H" (*who, what, when, where, why, & how*) in their reporting. This is also helpful to the student of the word of God. Author Kay Arthur **suggests that as we study the Scriptures we should ask:**

- **Who.** Who wrote it? Who said it? Who are the major characters? Who are the people mentioned? To whom is the author speaking?
 - **What.** What are the main events? What are the major ideas? What are the major teachings?
 - **When.** When was it written? When did this event take place? When will it happen? When did he say it? When did he do it?
 - **Where.** Where was this done? Where was this said? Where will it happen?
 - **Why.** Why was there a need for this to be written? Why was this reference mentioned? Why should they do such and such?
 - **How.** How was this done or accomplished? How did it happen? How is this truth illustrated? How did the people react?
- **Examine the historical setting, culture, and geography.**

Because each book of the Bible is written within a historical setting, it is important to understand both the historical setting and cultural practices. Bible handbooks, Bible dictionaries, or a good study Bible will explain the various cultural practices and

historical background that will aid you in your understanding of what God is saying in a particular passage of Scripture.

- **Discern the main theme of the book.**

The theme, or subject, will be the thought that is repeated over-and-over again throughout a book of the Bible. Once you discern the theme, look for a verse in the book—often called the “key” verse, that best expresses that theme. For example, the theme of the book of Judges is “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (cf. Judges 21:25; 17:6; 18:1; 19:1). The theme of the gospel of John is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God and the key verse is John 20:30,31.

- **Look for clearly defined segments.**

A segment is a major division in a book, such as a group of verses or chapters that deal with the same subject, the same doctrine, or the same person, place, or event. The book of Romans divides itself into two segments: chapters 1-11 are doctrinal; chapters 12-16 are practical (several other books have the same outline: Col. 1:1-3:9 & Col. 3:10-4:18; Heb. 1:1-12:29 & Heb. 13:1-25; 2 Pet. 1:1-4 & 2 Pet. 1:5-11). In the book of Genesis, chapters 1-11 focus on four major events (Creation, Fall, flood, & the tower of Babel) and chapters 12-50 on four major characters (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, & Joseph). In the book of Revelation, the divisions are clearly stated in Revelation 1:19: “... what you have seen” (chapter 1); “... what is now” (chapters 2 and 3); and “... what will take place later” (chapters 4-22—NIV). Because chapter and verse numbers were arbitrarily added 500 years ago, be aware that the subject of one chapter may continue into the next chapter.

- **Identify the context.**

The unpardonable sin in a study of the scriptures is to interpret a verse of scripture out of its context. Context refers to the words, phrases, or sentences that surround a particular verse or passage under study. Apart from the context, it is impossible to know the intended meaning of the words or sentences.

We must let the text speak for itself. You must **never** bring preconceived ideas or prejudices about what the text means into your study (*this is called “eisegesis” which literally means, “to lead into”*). Let the text interpret itself. Never forget that **the best commentary on the Scriptures is the Scriptures!**

The first step in the *Inductive Bible Study* method is Observation.

2. Interpretation.

The first step in the *Inductive Bible Study* method is to answer the question, “What does the Bible **say**?” The second step in the *Inductive Bible Study* method is to answer the question, “What does the Bible **mean** by what it says?”

In the book of Nehemiah, the people gathered in the street and asked Ezra, the scribe, to read from the book of the Law of Moses (Neh. 8:1). The key verse of this passage says, “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.” (Neh. 8:8 ESV) Nehemiah was concerned not merely with what the Law of Moses said but he was also concerned with what it meant by what it said.

The apostle Paul exhorted Timothy with these words:

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” (1 Tim. 4:13 ESV)

Pastor Dr. John MacArthur stated that Paul literally told Timothy “... to read the text, explain the text [**teaching**], and to apply the text [**preaching**].” (1 Tim. 4:13) You cannot read the text and then apply it—you must interpret it first.

Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules and it is an art because the application of the rules is done with skill. One of the reasons that there are so many religious so-called “Christian” religious groups in the world, with so many different belief systems, is because they do **not** have a proper biblical hermeneutic through which to filter the words of scripture and thus they do **not** correctly interpret the word of God.

In the *Interpretation* step of Bible study, we will let Scripture interpret Scripture. The following basic principles will help you interpret the word of God:

- **All Scripture must be interpreted with the supernatural aid of the indwelling Holy Spirit** (This is called, “The Spiritual Principle.”).

The Holy Spirit is not only the Author of Scripture but also the illuminator of that which He has written (cf. Jn. 16:13-15; 1 Cor. 2:11; 1 Jn. 2:27).

- **Scripture will never contradict Scripture** (This is called “The Synthesis Principle.”).

All major Bible doctrines are referred to in several passages of scripture, therefore, never build a doctrine on a single verse of scripture. (2 Pet. 1:20) Because all Scripture

is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16), it will never contradict itself. All obscure passages of scripture must be interpreted in the light of clearer ones. We hasten to add that the doctrine of the inerrancy of the scriptures does not mean that it is possible to give a clear interpretation of every passage (Deut. 29:29).

- **Interpret scripture literally** (This is called “The Literal Principle.”).

By interpreting the scriptures literally, we mean that we interpret the words as they are normally used in conversation rather than in an allegorical or metaphorical sense. We hasten to add that because we interpret the Bible literally does not mean that we do not recognize that there are figures of speech, idioms, hyperboles, or metaphors used in the Bible.

The literal method of interpretation does have a limit as expressed in the thoughts of Dr. David L. Cooper: “When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.” And we might add, “It is only when the plain sense of scripture makes nonsense do we look for another sense.”

- **Interpret scripture in its context.**

The word “context” refers to “that which goes with the text.” When you interpret anything—a word, a verse, or a passage—it must always be considered in the light of the surrounding verses and chapters, the book in which it is found, and the entire word of God. As is often said, “A text without context is a pretext.” A text of scripture removed from the context in which it was written may lead to an interpretation that the author never intended.

- **Interpret the passage in the historical, cultural, geographical, and religious context in which it was originally written** (This is called, “The Historical Principle.”).

Reconstructing the setting in which a passage of scripture was written will help you understand the full and clear meaning intended by the author. A good study Bible or Bible handbook can help you discern the setting.

- **Interpret the verse by a careful analysis of all words and phrases according to the rules of language** (This is called, “The Grammatical Principle.”).

Just as there are rules in interpreting the English language, there are also rules in interpreting the biblical languages. These rules of grammar must be followed to arrive at a correct interpretation of the text.

- **Interpret the passage so that it relates to life** (This is called, “The Practical Principle.”).

A proper interpretation of Scripture will yield principles that are to be obeyed and lived out. The Bible is a practical guide for successful living.

3. Application.

Application answers the question, “How does the meaning of this passage of Scripture apply to me?” Learning is not complete, and spiritual growth will not occur, unless we apply what we have learned to our life.

There is an old adage that says, “Interpretation is one; application is many.” This means that there is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture. This meaning is determined by careful study and may be applied to a number of different issues in life.

Bible application answers the following questions:

- How does the meaning of this passage apply to me?
- What truths am I to embrace, believe, or order my life by?
- What changes do I need to make in my beliefs or in my life?

Bible study is more than an intellectual exercise—it is a life transforming process. No matter how much you know about God's Word, if you do not apply what you learn, Scripture will never benefit your life. Once we understand what a passage means, we are responsible for putting it into practice and accountable if we don't. **Ultimately the goal of Bible study is a transformed life.**

Bible Study Tools

To aid you in your Bible study, we would recommend that you purchase the following books (hardback or electronic):

A Study Bible

Every believer should purchase a study Bible. A study Bible contains many helpful footnotes and charts that will aid your understanding of the Scriptures. Some study Bibles focus on interpretation and others on application of truth to life. If you need help in selecting a study Bible, please ask your facilitator.

Bible Translations

The key to maintaining a consistent habit of reading the Scriptures is linked to reading a translation of the Bible that you can understand. If one does not understand what he reads, he will soon quit reading it. Because some translations are better than others, you might need to ask for help in selecting a Bible translation. Your facilitator could help you with this also.

A Bible Concordance

A concordance gives an alphabetical listing of all words found in the Bible and their Scripture references. In choosing a concordance you should select one that is keyed to the version (translation) of the Bible that you use for study. A good concordance will also show you the Hebrew or Greek word from which the English language word was translated.

A Bible Dictionary

A Bible dictionary is arranged like a regular dictionary. The subjects of the Bible are listed in alphabetical order and they are explained in detail. Most Bible dictionaries have hundreds of pictures and charts to help you understand the Bible better.

A Topical Bible

A topical Bible lists the verses of the Bible by topic. If you wanted to study the subject of faith, you would look for “faith” listed alphabetically (as in a dictionary) and you would find verses speaking about faith from both the Old and New Testaments listed there.

A One-Volume Bible Commentary

Commentaries are written by Bible scholars who have studied a book of the Bible in detail. One volume Bible commentaries are relatively inexpensive whereas a complete set of commentaries can be expensive. We would recommend the *Bible Exposition Commentary* by Dr. Warren Wiersbe or *Wilmington’s Guide to the Bible* by Dr. Harold Wilmington.

Conclusion

There is absolutely no greater personal joy than to discover for yourself the meaning of a verse of Scripture. To hear God speak truth into your life is the privilege of every believer. By applying the three principles of the *Inductive Bible Study* method, you will begin an adventure that will last a lifetime.

Bible Study Fundamentals



Fundamentals of Prayer

By Steve Crawley and Jeff Swart

Synopsis of this Session: In this session, we will define what the Bible means by prayer and then share why prayer is important to the spiritual life of every believer. We will also discuss the issues of prayerlessness and unanswered prayer. And finally, we will get intensely practical and share ideas that will make your prayer life joyful, powerful, and effective.

Introduction

A study on the prayer habits of American pastors and laypeople conducted a decade ago discovered that the average pastor prays 7 minutes a day and the average layperson prays 3 minutes per day. As shocking as that statistic is, in the latest study (2020), it was discovered that the average pastor prays 4 minutes a day and the average layperson prays 30 seconds per day. Is it any wonder our churches are dying and believers are living in defeat?

What Is Prayer?

Most Christians might define prayer as “asking things from God” and they would be correct as the very word “prayer” itself means “to ask.” Jesus said, “**Ask**, and it will be given to you ... ⁸ For everyone who **asks** receives ...” (Matt. 7:7,8 ESV) and James adds, “You do not have, because you do not **ask**.” (James 4:2 ESV)

E.M. Bounds, the most prolific author on the subject of prayer, stated:

Prayer is the channel through which all good flows to men. Prayer is a privilege, a sacred, princely privilege ... It is the appointed condition of getting God's aid. It is the avenue through which God supplies man's wants.

Dr. Bounds was correct—prayer is a “privilege”—in fact, a blood bought privilege! Jesus died on the cross so that we could have the privilege to pray!

However, **prayer is not only the divinely appointed way to receive God’s blessings but it also the way to know God personally and intimately.** Through prayer we have the privilege of entering the presence of the God who spoke the worlds into being, the one who loves me, and the one who died for me on the cross. Prayer is God’s appointed means of getting to know him personally and intimately. It is into His presence we come when we pray.

Pastor Samuel Chadwick described the result of prayer in the life of the believer in these words: “Prayer ... turns ordinary mortals into men of power. It brings power. It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God!”

Prayer is the divinely appointed way of receiving the blessings of God and the avenue by which we can know God intimately.

Why Should I Pray?

We all do better when we know the “why” we are asked to do something. When we know the “why”—the “what” becomes more important.

Have you ever wondered?

- ◆ If God is omniscient and already knows our needs—why then do we need to pray? **How would you answer this question?**

- ◆ If God is truly a loving God and desires to meet our needs—why must we ask for what his love desires to give? **How would you answer this question?**

- ◆ If God is omnipotent, why doesn't he do what we ask? And finally, **how would you answer this question?**

When our hearts align with the heart of God, and our wills align with the will of God, we will see God do great and mighty things in our lives.

Let us suggest several reasons why every believer should pray:

- ◆ We pray because of what prayer accomplishes.

Prayer changes circumstances. Prayer changes hearts. But most importantly, prayer changes me so that my heart aligns with the heart of God. Pastor and author Chuck Swindoll declared: “You can do great things for God after you pray, but you cannot do anything for God until you pray.”

- ◆ We pray because God's Word commands it (cf. Is. 55:5; Matt. 7:7; Lk. 18:1; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:1,8; 1 Jn. 5:14,15) and to disobey a command of God is sin.

Paul taught us to be “praying at all times” (Eph. 6:18 ESV) and to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17 ESV). If we spend time in the act of prayer, we will respond to the experiences of life in an attitude of prayer and fulfill Paul's admonitions.

- ◆ As we have already stated, prayer is God's appointed way for obtaining God's blessings and knowing God intimately.
- ◆ We pray because we need to pray.

We need to pray because there are things in our lives that are not what they should be. We need to pray because we need God to change attitudes and thoughts, to empower us to forgive others, because we all have doubts, fears, and worries, because we are all tempted, and because we all have physical and spiritual needs.

- ◆ We pray because there is a devil.

Every time that you make a commitment to God, the devil will hear about it and attack you to prevent you from keeping your commitment. The only way to overcome the evil one is in prayer. When we pray, we are stronger than the devil because we bring the power of God into our lives! The late pastor Adrian Rogers asserted, “Prayer does not prepare us for battle, prayer is the battle.”

- ◆ We pray because prayer was important to Jesus.

The disciples heard Jesus teach the greatest sermons ever spoken on planet earth. The disciples saw Jesus restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, cure leprosy, multiply the loaves and the fish, walk on the Sea of Galilee, and many other miracles. Yet, the

only thing the disciples asked Jesus to teach them was how to pray (Lk. 11:10). This fact indicates that the greatest thing about Jesus' ministry was his prayer life.

Jesus is the perfect example in all things. (1 Pet. 2:21) If prayer was an important part of His daily life, it should be in ours also! (cf. Matt. 14:23; 19:13; 26:36,38,42; Mk. 1:35; 6:46; 14:32,35,39; Lk. 6:12; 9:18,29; 22:32,41,44)

If we were to ask this question, "What is the most important thing you did today?" we would probably receive a variety of answers. If we were to ask God the same question, no doubt, he would say, "You prayed."

Prayerlessness

Prayerlessness is not that we do not pray—it is that we pray less than the Father desires and less than we know we should. Pastor Tim Kellar stated, "When we fail to pray, we are preventing God's work in our lives."

Prayerlessness is a sin, **not** just a weakness:

- ◆ Since the Bible plainly calls it that (1 Sam. 12:23).
- ◆ Because several passages of scripture command Christians to pray (cf. Lk. 18:1; Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17).
- ◆ Because it leaves the door open for all other sin (Mk. 14:38).

Pastor Samuel Chadwick spoke of the spiritual battle that goes on between a believer and the devil over prayer:

The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.

In all honesty, it is much easier to "**work**" for God than to "**walk**" with God. But unless we "walk" with God, our "work" for God will **not** be effective.

Prayer is so simple and yet it is so hard! In fact, prayer is a spiritual battle against the forces of darkness in this world. Dr. John R.W. Stott candidly confessed: "The thing that I know will give me the deepest joy ... namely, to be alone with and unhurried in the presence of God, aware of His presence, my heart open to worship Him is often the thing I least want to do." The devil does not want us to pray and will do everything to keep us from praying because he knows that prayer is both "powerful and effective." **Prayer is in the 5% we keep saying that only you can do as no one can do it for you.**

Dr. Peter Marshall, formerly the chaplain of the United States Senate, prayed:

Father, I am beginning to know how much I miss when I fail to talk to thee in prayer, and through prayer to receive into my life the strength and the guidance which only Thou canst give. Forgive me for the pride and presumption that make me to continue to struggle to manage my own affairs to the exhaustion of my body the weariness of my mind, and the trial of my faith.

In a moment like this, I know that Thou couldst have worked Thy good in me with so little strain, with so little effort and then to Thee would have been given the praise and the glory. When I neglect to pray, mine is the loss. Forgive me, Lord.

It has been stated, "Prayerlessness is the end result of pride." If we do not pray, it as if we are telling God, "I got this! I don't need you." Because prayerlessness is a sin, it can only be dealt with by repentance and confession (1 Jn. 1:9). Ask God to forgive you for not praying as you ought and begin to pray today.

Answered And Unanswered Prayer

How many prayers have you prayed that God has answered? The answer is all of them. The Lord may reply "yes" (a direct answer), "I have something better for you" (a different answer), or "not at this time" (a delayed answer) but he does answer every prayer.

Ruth Bell Graham, wife of evangelist Dr. Billy Graham, once exclaimed, "Thank God for unanswered prayer! If not for unanswered prayer, I would have married the wrong man seven times." Pastor and author Dr. Jack Taylor candidly admitted, "If God answered all of my prayers the way that I prayed them, I would have destroyed myself long ago by my own request."

We think that we know what is best for our lives but we really don't. However, God does. Let us be thankful that God is too wise and too loving to answer every prayer the way we prayed it. Have you thanked God for unanswered prayer?

How Should I Pray?

We do not learn to pray by reading a book or hearing a sermon on prayer any more than you learn to swim or ride a bicycle by reading a book or hearing a lecture. We learn to swim by getting into the water and we learn to ride a bicycle by climbing on. We learn to pray by praying.

Let us make several suggestions that may be helpful in teaching you how to pray:

◆ **Pray every day at regular times.**

If you set a particular time and place to pray (Matt. 6:6) every day, it is much easier to develop a prayer routine. Put your appointment with God on your daily appointment calendar just as you put the names of people with whom you will meet today. Pray before you start your day (Mk. 1:35), before meals (Matt. 14:19), and before you go to sleep at night (Lk. 6:12).

◆ **Start a devotional life and prayer time tomorrow morning.**

Start by devoting ten minutes per morning to the spiritual disciplines. We suggest that you try the “154 plan.” Devote one minute to getting organized and a brief prayer asking God to speak to you (Ps. 11:18). Spend the next five minutes in devotional Bible study. It is more important for you to hear from God, than for God to hear from you. God already knows all about you, but you need to know more about Him. Spend the last four minutes in prayer.

Honestly, everybody misses the morning prayer time once in a while. If you miss a meal do you never eat again? No! You make up for it at the next meal. The same is true in your devotional life. If you miss a day, make up for it the next day. We all miss a day occasionally but do **not** quit!

After you develop the ten-minute devotional habit, add additional time. Start small but start!

◆ **Remember that prayer is simply talking to God.**

Talk to God like he is your best friend because if you are what you ought to be, he is! Tell Him everything you are thinking or feeling.

◆ **The length of your prayers.**

The length of your prayer does not make it more acceptable to God. Jesus condemned the Pharisees because they thought God would be more inclined to answer their prayers because their prayers were long (Matthew 6:7). However, several of the most effective prayers in the Bible were short. Jesus prayed, “Quit! Be still!” (Mk. 4:39 ESV) and Peter prayed, “Lord, save me!” (Matt. 14:30 ESV) and these prayers were immediately answered.

◆ **Make a prayer book.**

The purpose of a prayer book is to record all the people and things that you should be praying for. Include a section for family, friends, pastors, your church, missionaries, etc. This prayer book or prayer list will serve as a reminder for what and for whom you should be praying.

◆ **Keep a prayer journal.**

It is helpful to keep a prayer journal where you list what you are praying for and then write down how and when God answers those prayers. We all need to be reminded of the faithfulness of God to answer our prayers.

According to the scriptures, believers should pray:

- ◆ In Jesus' name. (cf. Jn. 14:13,14; 15:16; 16:23,24,26)
- ◆ In faith. (cf. Matt. 21:21,22; James 1:6; 5:15)
- ◆ In God's will. (1 Jn. 5:14,15)
- ◆ For God's glory. (Jn. 14:13)
- ◆ With a pure heart. (cf. Ps. 24:3,4; 66:18; Is. 59:1,2; Jn. 9:32; James 5:16; 1 Pet. 3:7)
- ◆ With boldness. (cf. 2 Cor. 3:4; Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:16; 1 Jn. 5:14-15)
- ◆ Early in the morning. (cf. Ps. 5:3; 55:17; 88:13; 119:147; Mk. 1:35)
- ◆ At night. (cf. Ps. 55:17; Lk. 6:12; 14:23; Jn 14:23)
- ◆ Often. (cf. Matt. 14:23; 19:13; 26:36,38,42; Mk. 1:35; 6:46; 14:32,35,39; Lk. 6:12; 9:18,29; 22:32,41,44)
- ◆ Persistently. (cf. Ps. 116:2; Lk. 11:5-10; 18:1-7; 21:36; Rom. 12:12)
- ◆ Patiently. (Ps. 40:1)
- ◆ With expectancy. (cf. 2 Chron. 7:14; 33:12; Ps. 86:7; Matt. 7:7,11; 21:22; Mk. 11:23-24; Lk. 11:9-10; Jn. 15:17; 16:24; 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:15)
- ◆ In humility. (cf. Gen. 18:27; Job 35:12-13; Ps. 9:12; 10:17; James 4:6,10; 1 Pet. 5:5,6)
- ◆ Specifically. (Phil. 4:16)
- ◆ For victory over temptation. (Matt. 26:41)
- ◆ For ourselves. (cf. Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6,7)
- ◆ For others. (cf. Matt. 9:37,38; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:25; 1 Tim. 2:1-4,8; Heb. 13:18; James 5:16)
- ◆ For those who mistreat you. (cf. Matt. 5:44; Lk. 6:28)
- ◆ For those who neglect or forsake you. (2 Tim.4:16)

What Should I Pray For?

Let us suggest a few things for which every believer should pray:

- ◆ For faith to overcome your doubts and fears (cf. Matt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23; 1 Tim. 2:8; James 1:6-8).
- ◆ For wisdom (James 1:5).

- ◆ For the lost (cf. Matt. 9:13; Lk. 15:4-7,32; 19:10). Evangelism does not begin with talking to men about God but by talking to God about men.
- ◆ For your wife and children (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).
- ◆ For our secular leaders (1 Tim. 2:2) and for our spiritual leaders (cf. 2 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 1:19).
- ◆ For our missionaries. (Acts 13:1-3)
- ◆ For America.

Conclusion

Christian author S.D. Gordon said:

The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is pray. It is not the only thing; but it is the chief thing. The great people of the earth today are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; but I mean those people who take time to pray.

Do you want to be “great” in the eyes of God? Then pray! We close with the sobering words of pastor Robert Murray McCheyne: "What a man is, he is alone on his knees before God, and no more."

Fundamentals of Prayer



BIBLICAL FASTING

By Jeff Swart

Synopsis of this Session: In this session, we will discuss the neglected spiritual discipline of fasting. Fasting is abstaining from food so that the time usually given to food preparation, eating, and cleaning up after the meal, can be redirected to spending the time in prayer. The purpose of fasting is to deal with our sins and draw closer to the Lord. We will address several different kinds of biblical fasts and show from the scriptures how fasting was used by biblical characters.

Introduction

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1–7:29), Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they were hypocritical in their giving, praying, and fasting. Then, Jesus taught his disciples the proper way to give, pray, and fast. This is what Jesus said concerning the spiritual discipline of fasting:

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But **when you fast,** put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:16-18 NIV)

Jesus put his finger on the wrong motives that were behind the religious leaders of Israel’s practice of fasting. The religious leaders marked their faces with ashes from a fire, did not comb their hair, wore sackcloth for clothing, and then stood at the busiest corner in the city of Jerusalem or in the marketplace where they would be seen by the most people. God will honor the man who fasts but only if he does it out

of sight of men. So, according to Jesus, the motive behind fasting is more important than the act itself.

Although it is well documented that there is a physical value to fasting, in this session, we will focus on the **spiritual** value of fasting.

What Is Fasting?

The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament for “fasting” referred to the practice of self-denial. In the New Testament, the Greek word translated into English as the word “fast” means, “not to eat” or “to abstain from food.” **Fasting is abstaining from food so that the time usually given to food preparation, eating, and cleaning up after the meal can be redirected to spending the time in prayer.** The purpose of fasting is to deal with our sins and draw closer to the Lord.

Interestingly, the only commandment in the Scriptures to fast was given to the children of Israel and was connected with the Day of Atonement. (cf. Lev. 16:29-31; 23:27-32; Num. 29:7,8). Fasting is not commanded in the New Testament, but Jesus certainly assumed that we would fast when He said, “**When** you fast ...” (Matt. 6:16,17).

Four Different Kinds of Fasts

There are four different kinds of fasts:

1. The Normal Fast.

The normal fast is going without food for a definite period of time during which you ingest only liquids (water and/or juice). The duration can be one meal, one day (cf. Jud. 20:26; 1 Sam. 14:24; 2 Sam. 1:12; 3:35), three days (Esth. 4:16), one week (cf. 1 Sam. 32:13; 2 Sam. 12:16-18), or forty days (Moses—Ex. 34:28, Elijah—1 Kin. 19:8; Jesus—Luke 4:2).

2. The Absolute Fast.

The absolute fast is when you abstain from both food and water and therefore it should be short. Several Bible characters practiced an absolute fast:

- Moses fasted for forty days and nights on Mount Sinai when he received the Ten Commandments. (Ex. 34:28)

- Moses (Ex. 34:28), Elijah (1 Kin. 19:8), and Jesus (Luke 4:2) all fasted for forty days and nights.
- Esther instructed Mordecai to fast for “three days, night or day ...” (Esth. 4:16 ESV)
- Paul did not eat or drink for three days following his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:9)

3. The Partial Fast.

The partial fast is one that omits certain foods or is on a schedule that includes limited eating. You may omit starches, sweets, carbonated beverages, caffeine, etc. for a period of time or on certain days of the week or you may even omit one meal a day. We know that Daniel practiced the partial fast because he listed the things that he abstained from for a period of three weeks. (Dan. 10:3)

4. Fasting from things.

Although this type of fast is **not** mentioned in the Scriptures, we believe that it could be Christ honoring. Some things that the 21st century believer might fast from include:

- Social media.
- Television or streaming channels.
- Emailing or texting.

Biblical Examples of Fasting

In the scriptures, fasts were proclaimed and practiced on the following occasions which should serve as a guide as to why believers should fast today:

◆ Times of mourning or great spiritual need.

- The Israelites fasted after a humiliating loss in battle to the Benjamites. (Judg. 20:26)
- The nation of Israel fasted upon the death of a leader. (cf. 2 Sam. 1:12; 3:35; 31:13; 1 Chron. 10:12)
- David fasted during the illness of his child born by Bathsheba (2 Sam.12:16) and also when Abner died (II Sam. 3:35).
- Israel fasted during a drought. (Jer. 14:1-12)
- King Darius fasted during the night that Daniel was in the lion’s den. (Dan. 6:18)
- Israel fasted during a plague of locusts. (cf. Joel 1:14; 2:12-15)

◆ Times of overwhelming danger.

- King Jehoshaphat proclaimed a national fast in Judah when they were threatened with an attack from the Moabites and Ammonites. (2 Chron. 20:3)
- Queen Esther, her servants, and all the Jews in the capital city of Susa, all fasted for three days before Esther went before the king to plead that the Jews be spared from Haman's wicked schemes. (Esth. 4:16)
- Ezra declared a fast when the children of Israel were getting ready to return to Jerusalem from Babylon. (Ezra 8:21-23)
- Paul and the sailors on the ship fasted for fourteen days because the storm was so great. (Acts 27:33)

◆ **As a demonstration of one's repentance.**

- Daniel fasted as he prayed for God to forgive the sins of his people. (Dan. 9:3)
- Samuel led God's people to confess their sins and fast as the Ark of the Covenant was reclaimed from the Philistines. (1 Sam. 7:6)
- King Ahab repented when confronted by the prophet Elijah and fasted. (2 Kin. 21:27)
- As Ezra confessed the sins of his people, he fasted. (Ezra 10:6)
- When the Israelites returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, the word of God was read to the people and in response they fasted and confessed their sins. (Neh. 9:1,2)
- The people of Nineveh repented when they heard the preaching of Jonah and fasted. (Jon. 3:5,7)
- Through the prophet Joel, God called his people to, "... return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (Joel 2:12 NIV; cf. Joel 1:14; 2:15)

◆ **To understand the will of God.**

- Daniel fasted as he sought to understand the prophecies of Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2,3) and the angel Gabriel came to give him a revelation in response to his fasting. (cf. Dan. 9:21,22; 10:3)
- Jesus fasted for forty days and nights prior to the beginning of His personal ministry. (Lk. 4:2)
- Paul fasted for three days after meeting the Lord on the road to Damascus in order to determine God's direction for his life. (Acts 9:9)
- Cornelius fasted and prayed to understand the way of salvation. (Acts 10:30)
- The church at Antioch was praying and fasting when the Holy Spirit revealed to them that they were to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a special ministry. (Acts 13:2,3)
- Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted to know God's will as to whom they should appoint as elders in the churches. (Acts 14:23)

◆ **To attain spiritual victory.**

- Daniel and the three Hebrew children determined that they would not defile themselves by eating the food from the King of Babylon's table but fasted instead. (Dan. 1:8)
- The disciples could not cast a demon out of a young boy and when they asked Jesus why they could not do it, He replied, "This kind [of power] goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Matt. 17:21 KJV)

Fasting Is Linked With Prayer & A Pure Heart

In the Scriptures, fasting is always linked with:

◆ **Prayer.**

Believers can pray without fasting, but they cannot fast without praying (cf. 1 Sam. 1:7-11; 2 Sam. 12:16-23; Neh. 1:8-10; Ps. 35:13; 109:21-24; Dan. 6:18; 9:3,15-19; 10:1-3; Lk. 2:37; Acts 10:30; 14:23).

◆ **A pure heart.**

God rejected the fasting of the children of Israel (cf. Is. 55:5-9; Jer.14:12; Zech. 7:5,9,10) and the Pharisees (Matthew 6:16) because their hearts were **not** pure.

Fasting Is Important

Fasting is particularly important for the believer for the following reasons:

- ◆ Some believers are in bondage to demonic powers, besetting sins, and are facing tremendous temptations.
- ◆ All believers need wisdom to solve the complex problems in their lives. (James 1:5)
- ◆ The church of today is in desperate need of revival.
- ◆ The world is in desperate need to hear the gospel.
- ◆ The church needs men of character and integrity.

Conclusion

Let us suggest the following activities during your fast:

- ◆ Determine the length of the fast.

We would suggest that you begin practicing the discipline of fasting by skipping one meal. After you have succeeded in doing this several times, then you might fast for 24 hours from noon to noon. This means that you would skip two meals—supper and breakfast. During this time, you could drink water and/or fruit juices. Choose the regularity that you practice the discipline of fasting. Begin with one day a quarter, then one day a month, and finally one day a week.

We strongly suggest that if you are diabetic or hypoglycemic that you fast only under the care of your personal physician.

When fasting, we suggest that you:

- ◆ Spend extended periods of time in prayer. (cf. Ps. 35:13; Matt. 7:7; Lk. 2:37; 1 Thess. 5:17; James 1:6)
- ◆ Ask God to reveal any sin to you. (cf. Ps. 19:12; 139:23,24)
- ◆ Confess any and all sin that the Holy Spirit reveals, repent of them, and ask God for forgiveness. (cf. Ezra 10:6; Joel 2:12; 1 Jn. 1:9)
- ◆ Read sizable portions of Scripture. (Rom. 10:17)
- ◆ Select verses of Scripture to memorize. (Ps. 119:11)
- ◆ Worship God. Anna worshipped God as she fasted and prayed. (Lk. 2:37)

You May Find It Helpful To Fast As You Develop Your *Life Plan*

Jesus stated that when we fast we should be discreet about it so that men will **not** know that we are fasting. (Matt. 6:18) When you fast “in secret,” you may be out of the sight of men but God “... who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” openly. (Matt. 6:18 NIV) He who fasts regularly, sincerely, and with a pure heart will be rewarded by the Lord.

Biblical Fasting