

## **Week 4 Foundation-Guided by Prayer**

### **Summary**

As we strive to be an intentional congregation our second foundation is to be guided by prayer. Prayer expresses our belief that God is involved in this world, in our lives, and in the work of the congregation. God invites us to ask, seek, and knock on his door. In prayer we express our faith, we confess our sins, we challenge our doubts, we shout our joys, and we cry our fears and struggles before our God who cares. Through prayer we surrender our lives into the hands of God trusting that He will provide, He will guide, He will empower our plans for effective ministry.

### **Week 4 – Guided by Prayer**

Prayer has always been an important component of a life of faith for those who seek to follow God. People of faith in the Old Testament and New Testament engaged in prayer for different reasons and on various occasions. Prayer is important for us as individuals in our daily walk of faith and to strengthen our personal relationship with God. Prayer is also an important component of our life together as a congregation. Like singing, prayer is something that we everyone can join together as one act of worship. By joining our thoughts, hearts, faith, and minds in prayer to God we are united in our faith and act out what it means to be a part of a body. There are some interesting examples of group prayers:

- ❖ Ezra 8:1-23 Ezra assembles the families who were going back to Jerusalem and they pray together for a safe journey. In this prayer, Ezra expresses the tension between practical actions and faith.
- ❖ Deut 4:7 Moses expresses God's attentiveness to prayer as a blessing to the group. The fact that God listens to the prayers of his people means that the possibilities in life and in the future are much more open.
- ❖ Isaiah 64:1-9 This unit of Scripture reads like a Psalm of lament by the group who express their collective desire for God's help
- ❖ Acts 1:14, 24 After Jesus ascension, the church was gathered together waiting for the things that Jesus had told them would happen. One of the primary activities of their gatherings was to pray together.
- ❖ Acts 4:24f In this situation the church is gathered together in prayer after Peter and John were released from prison. They pray that their ministry together would be effective. They don't pray for safety but instead they pray for boldness.
- ❖ Acts 12:5-12 In this situation, Peter has been arrested again and now the church is gathered together to pray for his release. Since Peter knows where to go to find people it appears that the church was in a habit of coming together to pray.
- ❖ In several places prayer is spoken of as a ministry and a participation in the ministry efforts of others. In this sense, prayer is a collective effort empowering the people involved in the actual work through the spiritual work of prayer. See Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 1:11; Col 4:12f for examples.

### **Spiritual Reality of Prayer**

Prayer is much more than simply a good practice that benefits the emotional and psychological health of those that practice it. It is more than simply having a positive attitude and mental focus, there is a spiritual side to what is going on. We get a glimpse into this spiritual side of prayers in a couple of interesting portions of Scripture:

- ❖ Dan 10:1-14 In this vision, Daniel is receiving the answer to his prayers and his quest to understand. The answer is delivered by an angelic messenger who reports that he was dispatched with the answer but was detained by the "prince of Persian kingdom" and Michael was sent to help him reach Daniel. This story is a vision and so we need to be careful about taking every aspect of the vision literally, but the basic message of the vision is true. In this case the basic message is that God sent an answer to Daniel but the timing of Daniel receiving that answer involved other situations. The main point I am trying to bring out of this is that when Daniel prayed, there was something that happened in the spiritual realm.
- ❖ Rev 5:8; 8:3f – In this apocalyptic vision John is shown a vision about a spiritual struggle between Satan and God. In that struggle there are many symbols and incidents depicted involving war, destruction, hardships, etc. In Rev 5:8 we are in the throne room of God which includes unusual creatures and twenty-four elders. These elders are each holding a harp and a bowl. The bowls are filled with the prayers of the saints. The scene depicts

clearly the idea that our prayers are carried to the presence of God and serve a function there. Later in the book (8:3f) these bowls (containing the prayers) are poured out on the earth resulting in destruction. Here we see the basic outline of the story of Revelation. The vision concerns the battle between God and the forces of evil, Jesus is the one who reveals the story by unfurling the scroll. The end of the story clearly shows that God wins the battle and Satan and his powers are destroyed for ever. Without getting into many details, the interesting aspect of this vision is that it is the prayers of the saints play a crucial role in the destruction of evil. Our prayers are not empty or powerless, but the answers to them may be awaiting the end of time.

### ***Hindrances to Effective Prayer***

Prayer is not magic in the sense that by saying the right words we unlock the secret powers in the universe. But prayer is also not meaningless in the sense that they are not connected to power, power that can change circumstances and have an effect in our physical world. There are several things mentioned in Scripture that effect the effectiveness of our prayers.

- ❖ Matt 17:14f / Mk 9:14f / Lk 9:37f – A boy is brought to Jesus who has convulsions. The disciples had attempted to heal this boy but were unsuccessful so the father of the boy brings him to Jesus who heals the boy. Jesus comments about the situation saying, “O unbelieving and perverse generation.” When asked why they could not heal the boy, Jesus told the disciples that the reason was their lack of faith and that this kind of healing required prayer. Faith is a necessary element for effective prayer
- ❖ John 15:1-8 - Jesus is speaking with the disciples and telling them the importance of remaining “in the vine.” When the disciples remain a part of Jesus then they will be able to bear fruit for the kingdom. If the disciples remain in Jesus and are following his will, then Jesus says “ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” This is not a genie-in-a-bottle kind of promise where we get three wishes. The context clearly depicts that the asking of the disciples is already aligned with the will of God through the “remaining.” The relationship with Jesus is the critical component of effective ministry.

### **Other Hindrances mentioned include:**

- ❖ Marriage relationship – 1 Pet 3:7
- ❖ Distractions and burdens – 1 Pet 4:7
- ❖ Broken relationships between brothers and sisters – Mk 11:25