

Session One: Practical Sanctification

I am going to start with a question that has everything to do with prayer. Now that we have trusted Christ as our Savior, what is God's will for us while we are still here on the earth? That is the question.

If we do not understand what God's will is for us, then two things will be true: 1) it will be difficult to cooperate with Him in the accomplishment of His will, and 2) we will not know how to pray; not properly.

So, what is God doing with us; what is His will? Just to state the point from the beginning, once we have been justified unto eternal life, **God's will is the development of our practical sanctification.** Notice I said practical. When we trusted Christ, we were given a new identity in Christ in connection with our sanctification, but that did not automatically make us holy in our everyday lives.

What our positional sanctification did was make our practical sanctification possible. When we trusted Christ, we were given a positional sanctification, which if we are ever to become holy in the way we live our lives, we had to have. And from that time onward, God's goal has been the development of our practical sanctification so that it comes up to the level of our positional sanctification.

So, what is God's will for us? In a word, sanctification. That is everything to God. It cannot be overstated. This is why sonship is such a big deal, because sonship is about our sanctification.

To say it another way, God's will is for us to become holy in the details of our lives. So, what is God doing today? He is making us holy. This is God's will. And how is He working to make us

holy? By using everything that happens in the course of our lives, no matter what it is.

People think wealth is a blessing from God. Did you ever stop to consider, if wealth was a blessing from God, then only Christians would be wealthy. How can that be? Because God is not giving his sons and daughters what the world is already giving to the unsaved. If God was doing that, then what about those Christians who live in parts of the world where poverty is a way of life for the vast majority of the population? They have no cars, few possessions, no climate controlled housing, few conveniences, no retirement program, no savings account, no health insurance, few furnishings, no social security, no 401k, and very little education.

If God is planning on wealth as part of His blessing, there are places in the world where He isn't doing a very good job. Because Christians in the west are carnal these days, we don't like to hear that God isn't taking care of us financially. You can eat and pay the bills because you work or have an income. And God doesn't guarantee either of those; a job or an income. Don't believe me? Listen to our apostle who knew a thing or two about doing without.

Philippians 4:10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

¹¹ Not that I speak in respect of want: **for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.** ¹² I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Paul says he was instructed to both “be full” and “be hungry.” He was instructed to “abound and suffer need.” Who instructed Paul in that, the devil? No, the Lord instructed Paul to know what to do when he had plenty, and what to do when he had nothing. Why? Because the issue is not for Paul to have physical blessings, the issue is Paul’s sanctification. And that is God’s issue with you, too.

Since God is working in the spiritual realm today, and not the physical realm, let me ask a question: Do you know what kind of wealth God wants us to have? There is a wealth that God gives to His people that the lost world can never have.

When we trusted Christ, we received the riches of his grace.

Ephesians 1:7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to **the riches of his grace;**

Then, after we trusted Christ we received the following riches:

Romans 9:23 And that he might make known **the riches of his glory on** the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

Romans 11:33 O the depth of **the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!**

Ephesians 1:18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what **the riches of the glory of his inheritance in** the saints,

Ephesians 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ;**

Colossians 1:27 To whom God would make known what ***is the riches of the glory of this mystery*** among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

Colossians 2:2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all ***riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God***, and of the Father, and of Christ;

He wants us to experience the unsearchable riches of Christ! And how many members of the body of Christ are meant to have the riches of Christ; the riches of His glory; the riches of His grace; the riches of His wisdom; the riches of this mystery, and the riches of His inheritance? Every member.

And here we learn an important principle which we will only introduce, but later we will flesh it out: ***What God gives to one member of the body of Christ, He will give to every member.***

Therefore, if a few are getting something they think is a blessing from God, but not every member gets it, then that is not from God. Just keep that in your thinking for now.

If health was an intended blessing from God, then only Christians would be healthy. Why? Because the blessings of God are not the same as the blessings that come from living in the world. Are some lost people healthy? They are. But health and healing are physical issues, and what you will learn is that no matter what does or does not happen to our bodies, God's goal remains the same; sanctification.

What we do not understand is that God can use our sickness, injury, and infirmities to edify us and accomplish sanctification even more than He can use your good health. That does not mean God will make you sick to sanctify you, but neither will He give you a miraculous healing. Why not?

God knows that you will never be edified by a miraculous healing, but by going through it with patience and faith, sanctification takes place. And here is what most Christians don't know: to God, your sanctification is a thousand times more important than your physical healing.

God will never short-circuit the spiritual work He is doing in your inner man to accomplish a physical work. He will never do that which opposes His own will; that we be sanctified. This is why Romans 8:28 is in the Bible.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

What is this “good” Paul refers to? What is this “purpose?” He tells us in the next verse.

Romans 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

God has designed for everything we go through, good or bad, to work to conform us to the image of His Son. What does it mean for us to be conformed to the image of Christ? In a word, sanctification. While God is not orchestrating bad things, instead of contravening them by His miraculous power, He uses them.

This is why 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 is also in the Bible.

2 Corinthians 4:16 For which cause we faint not; but **though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed** day by day.¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;¹⁸ While **we look not at the things which are seen**, but at the things which are not

seen: for **the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

Paul isn't interested in preserving the physical things pertaining to his body; he is interested in his inward man, for that is where sanctification takes place. He is not looking at physical things because those are temporal; he is interested in the spiritual work of sanctification because that work is eternal.

Not all believers are healthy, but they are all holy. Yes, in their positional sanctification, they are holy. And God knows that someone who responds properly to situations of suffering will enhance their practical sanctification, and that is His will. This is what God is doing with us; making us holy by every means necessary.

As part of our practical sanctification, we are being edified unto godliness by the Spirit of God within us and the effectual working of God's word. The issue with God is not when we lived in history, where we live in the world, what kind of job we work, where we go on our honeymoon, who our parents are, how tall we are, where we went to school, how much money we make, how strong we are, or how many degrees we hold. The issue with God is our sanctification, period.

Therefore, by everything that happens to us, whether it be good or bad, we are being conformed to the image of God's Son. We are to labor in the word of truth until Christ is formed in us. These phrases are all sanctification phrases. This is what God is interested in and all His eggs are in this one basket.

Our life is not about our physical life or the things which pertain to our physical life; it is about our spiritual life. The main issue is not about our advancement in position or lifestyle, but our advancement in holiness. And once we know

this, it will reorder our prayer life and center it on what God wants to do instead of what we want God to do.

This is going to be hard for some people to understand but everything that needs to happen in order for us to be justified unto eternal life and sanctified unto functional life, God has already done and made available to us in Christ. There is nothing left for Him to do. So, our prayers are not about what we need Him to do, but about how we appropriate that which He has already provided. It is all about your sanctification.

The more you understand this, the more you will understand prayer and how to pray.

Therefore, in this first session we will discuss the dispensational change and its impact on prayer. As we know, a dispensational change took place when the Lord Jesus Christ intercepted Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

Prior to that time, God had been dealing with the nation of Israel in a prophetic program. That program was administered under the Law of Moses, whereby God dealt with the nation under a performance system.

At the stoning of Stephen, God temporarily interrupted that prophetic program and with the salvation of Saul, He ushered in the dispensation of grace in a program called the mystery of Christ.

Since we are using that term, let's make sure we understand what the "mystery of Christ" is. The mystery of Christ is a secret purpose which God has in Christ involving a new dispensation (grace) and a new creation (the church, the body of Christ).

While we could talk about all the ways that God is dealing with us differently than He did with Israel in the time past of their

program, one of the biggest differences concerns the issue of prayer, especially when it comes to the kinds of things we should be praying for.

The problem is, when people are unaware of the dispensational change, or of the implications of that change, they find their prayer model all over the Bible. This has them praying for God to do things which He is no longer doing; they have confused the programs.

They think God is dealing with them as He did with Israel back in the Old Testament, and so sometimes they pray for the same things Israel prayed for, expecting God to continue doing the things He was doing with Israel under the Law. But we are not Israel. God has not given us their covenants or promises, and, very importantly, we are not under the Law. God is dealing with us very differently than He dealt with Israel. And this is the Achilles' Heel of almost every book on prayer.

If we are going to have the kind of prayer life we are meant to have, then it must be based on a proper understanding of who we are (members of the body of Christ); which program we are a part of (the mystery of Christ), and how God is dealing with people in that program (by grace).

This confusion of the programs is something that Satan works to promote among the members of the body of Christ, because if he can keep us praying and living out of Israel's program, we will not become who we are meant to be in this Mystery Program; we will be stuck in the past, living and praying in contradiction to what God is doing today.

As we examine Paul's prayers, we will see that they are overwhelmingly spiritual and they stand in stark contrast to the things which Israel prayed for.

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

Romans 15:5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

Romans 15:13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

1 Corinthians 1:4 I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;

⁵ That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge; ⁶ Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: ⁷ So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁸ Who shall also confirm you unto the end, *that ye may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

2 Corinthians 9:14 And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.

Ephesians 1:16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷ That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of

him: ¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ²⁰ Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*,

Ephesians 3:14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; ¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; ¹⁹ And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Philippians 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment; ¹⁰ That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; ¹¹ Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ That ye might

walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; ¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son:

1 Thessalonians 5:23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:11 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with power: ¹² That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

Summation:

- God's will for every believer is for the advancement of their (practical) sanctification
- Sanctification is a spiritual work by the Spirit and the word of God to transform us in our soul
- The dispensational change changes the focus of our prayers

Session Two: Defining Prayer

In this session, I want to give us the first of three definitions of prayer.

Definition: Prayer is our response to what God has said in His word.

When we think of prayer as a response to something God has said in His word, it changes our prayers in three ways.

1. When we think of prayer this way, it forces us to connect our prayers with the word of God.

How so? Because the written word of God is how we know what God has said. We are going to talk more about this later on, but when I say “the written word of God,” I am referring primarily to Paul’s epistles.

2. When we think of prayer this way, it automatically guides the subject of our prayers.

Too often, we want to pray about individualized things which do not appear in the word of God at all. Here is my point; God will not tell you who to marry. He does not have “a will” about it other than they should not be an unbeliever. God is not going to “give you a sign” so you will know if this person is the right one.

In the same way, God will not tell you what kind of work to do for a living. He will not tell you where to live in the world. He will not tell you how many children to have. He will not tell you where to go to college or what to major in. These are all sonship decisions which are up to you to make. But, when you do not know how to pray, these are the kinds of things that make up your prayer life. This kind of praying assumes that

the Bible alone is not enough; that we need God to use His omniscience and look to the future and give us directions so that things turn out good for us.

Instead of allowing what God has said in His word to guide our prayers, we spend our time talking to God “off topic.” What God really wants to hear from you is a response to the things He has already said to you in His word.

But that is not all. There is a third benefit that this definition of prayer will do for us.

3. When we think of prayer this way, it makes God the initiator of our prayers, structuring the order and content of our prayers.

Prayer, when it is properly done, is not about us bringing something to God’s attention, but it is us responding to God about something He has brought to our attention.

This definition of prayer fits every type of prayer we can pray. Just wait and I will show you. But first, do you understand what I am saying about prayer? A response is a reply. Do you understand what that means? The implication is that when we pray, no matter what the issue of our prayer may be, we are making a reply to God. In other words, we are not the initiator of prayer, God is.

If you are like me, realizing this truth makes the puzzle pieces fall into place concerning prayer. This definition is the inter-dispensational truth of prayer that forms the foundation of our prayer life. What that means is that prayer in both Testaments is a response to what God has already said.

Understanding prayer from this perspective is like walking through a door to a whole new vista. This is going to change our prayer lives for the better. It will also answer some of our biggest questions about prayer.

Stop and think about that for a minute. If prayer is a conversation we are having with God, then God is the initiator of the conversation, and not us. I realize this runs counter to what you would intuitively think. But when we recognize the biblical principle involved; that God is always the initiator of every relationship, of every action; then we see this makes sense for prayer as well. Here is my point: God always makes the first move.

In Creation, God made the first move by creating us. He obviously created everything without any input from us. That is what is meant when the Bible says He did it “by His own good pleasure.” In the scriptures, we find that God has done several things “according to His own good pleasure.” That means He alone is the initiator.

Ephesians 1:5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself,
according to the good pleasure of his will,

Ephesians 1:9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, **according to his good pleasure** which he hath purposed in himself:

Philippians 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of **his good pleasure.**

2 Thessalonians 1:11 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this*

calling, and fulfil all **the good pleasure of his goodness**, and the work of faith with power:

The four example above expressly say that God did these things according to His good pleasure; according to His will. He did not do them in response to any outside source, which makes God the initiator of all of these. They involve us, but they didn't start with us, they started with God.

As another example, in His love toward us, God made the first move.

1 John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

God loved us before we ever loved Him.

In Redemption, God made the first move.

Romans 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

In preserving us, God made the first move.

Ephesians 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

God chose us in Christ before He even created the world. This action was not based on anything we had done; we weren't even around yet. And why did God determine that we should be "holy and without blame before Him?" Again, because it was His good pleasure to do so. That does not mean it was a whim or without purpose, quite the contrary. Everything concerning God's good pleasure was necessary and critical, which is why He must be the initiator of all of it.

Think about this: there is no topic that God wants you to pray about that He hasn't already initiated the conversation in His word.

If this sounds strange to you, I understand why. You may be thinking, "Can't I bring up some situation I am going through, and talk to God in prayer about it? Of course you can, you have a free will. The real question is: what are you expecting God to do in response to those prayers?

Since we are responding to instructions God has written to us, God has designed prayer so we can instantly communicate to Him without restriction. In other words, there is no position or posture to assume, but we can pray in any position and our prayers are just as viable. We can pray any time, day or night, and He hears us. In fact, this is a big difference in prayer for us in that we have no certain liturgy to perform in order for God to hear our prayers. It makes no difference if we pray audibly or silently in our heart, God hears it all. But what God really wants to hear is us responding to the things He has already said to us in His word.

I personally believe that everything we need to live for God; everything we need to know about how to deal with tribulations and sufferings; everything we need to know about God's will; everything we need to know about who we are in God's plan and purpose; everything we need to know about what God has done for us; everything we need to know about our future; everything we need to know about what God is doing and why He is doing it; everything we need to know about salvation; and everything we need to know about everything we need to know is given to us in God's written word.

And if I am right about that, then everything God wants to talk about He has written to us in His word, then that makes God the initiator of prayer.

Why was God so invested in giving us His word? Because our present relationship to God is not face to face. If it was, things would be different. God has written us thirteen letters to give us all the instructions we need for as long as we are on this earth.

Secondly, if God did not set the agenda for our prayers by His word, we would not know what to pray for. We would gravitate to the kinds of prayers the heathen developed for their false gods. We would not understand who God is or what He is doing. We would only guess as to His will. But by God giving us an inspired revelation of Himself, we can know the things we ought to know, and pray accordingly.

God's word should be the start of every conversation we are meant to have with Him. God is omniscient and it was out of that omniscience that God formulated His word. It is designed to give us answers to our questions, and solutions to our problems without having to name them individually. That is the nature of the Bible, and it sets it apart from every other book in the world.

The next time the Lord gets up from His throne at the Father's right hand, and appears in bodily form and utters an audible voice will be at the Blessed Hope! And when that happens, we will all see Him and hear Him. Until that time, He has given us written instructions that explain what He is doing and our part in that. It contains the things He expects us to focus on because they are the things which are His will. And until we are gone from this world, when we pray; what God is waiting to hear is our reply to those written instructions.

When we understand what prayer is (our reply to the things God has already said); when our prayers are directly connected to the portion of His word that was written specifically to us, it will change the way we pray.

This means that we have been looking at prayer the wrong way. We have been thinking that we initiate prayer, telling God what we want; then we wait for God to get back to us. We are talking to God, but the question is, is He talking back? Certainly not in an audible voice. That's the rub, isn't it? If we could hear an audible voice, that would eliminate any confusion. So, when we don't hear a voice; when our specific issue is not mentioned in the Bible, then we think prayer is the way to get an individualized answer from God. But if that is how prayer works, how can we discern His answer? It's a dilemma.

In order to solve this dilemma, books on prayer almost always have a chapter on "how to hear God's voice." These are well-meaning and sincere attempts to make sense of prayer when we don't hear an audible voice responding to us. We are told that we are supposed to "hear" God in our spirit. But the challenge is discerning God's voice from all the other thoughts that are going through our mind. It can be confusing. And how many times have I tried to detect God's voice in all the thoughts of my mind, only to discover later, that what I thought was God's voice, wasn't God's voice at all. Is prayer supposed to be so uncertain?

Don't you think that if someone had actually found the "key" to discerning God's voice, and it worked every time, that it would be preached everywhere by now? But every year we have a plethora of new books on prayer, trying to tell us how to detect that "still, small voice" of God. Do you know why?

Because we have lost sight of how God has spoken to us; by His written word.

Don't think of the Bible as just a book, but think of it as a series of conversation starters.

So, what do the books on prayer tell us to do? They give us a wide range of strategies whereby we can discern God's voice. For example, we are told to pause for a moment of silence to "let God speak to us." This ignores the fact God has already spoken to us in His word. If we are pausing instead of reading, what are we expecting to hear? If we are pausing to hear something that is not in His written word, then why give us His word at all? Look, if we are pausing to hear something that is not written in His word, we are listening for the wrong thing.

When we think this way, we are revealing that we think God's word is not enough. In fact, we place such emphasis on this extra-biblical communication that without it, we just can't have a relationship with God. While our desire for a relationship with God is well-intentioned, Satan has used this to blind us to the truth of how God speaks to us today; through His written word.

Let me give you an example by quoting from a book written on prayer in 2023. It was in a list of what a major publication called, "The 20 best books on prayer written in 2023." Before we read from this book, please know that I think this is a sincere attempt to find a "real" relationship with God, and the author wants every believer to have this relationship. I believe it is sincere, but I also believe it is mistaken. Even so, I believe these men are saved; they love God and want to know Him in an intimate way. And that is a great goal. These men are my bothers in Christ, and I love them. And even though I disagree, I applaud their courageous attempt to help people with prayer.

Here is the quote, which I am refraining to reference because I don't mean this in a critical way.

"I started a habit of beginning each day with a period of silence, asking God to speak to me or interact with me in a way I could hear and understand. I just needed to know there was someone on the other end of this conversation. To be honest, I did that for a long time without feeling anything at all."

I understand what is being said here. In fact, I've experienced it as I tried to make my old understanding of prayer work. But the last sentence in the quote betrays the misunderstanding; "...I did that for a long time without feeling anything at all."

If we are looking for a feeling to tell us our prayers are working, we are looking at prayer wrong. If we are thinking that God is going to carry on a conversation like we would have with our neighbor, we are looking at prayer wrong. If we think it is up to God to engage with our conversation, we are looking at prayer wrong.

In my research, I have discovered that a few authors act like their prayer time with God is very conversational; "I said this..., and God said...". Those who think God is having a conversation with them, especially about things outside of the scriptures, are either being misled by the satanic policy of evil or they are making it up.

Most people recognize they are not going to get a full-blown conversation, so they relegate God's "answer" as either "yes" or "no," and that is usually not a "voice," but a feeling. They say things like, "I had a peace about my request, so I know that what I am asking is okay with God." But once you understand what prayer is about, you will realize that "having a peace in your heart" is not the signal that you are in God's will.

Still others are not expecting any kind of answer at all; they simply wait to see if they get what they asked for and then discern God's answer from that.

In the way we have always been taught to pray, we judge God's answers to our prayers by one of two ways: 1) whether or not we get what we ask for, and 2) the emotional "feeling" we experience. This assumes if we get what we ask for, then it must have been God that did it, and that is how we know God is engaged with our prayers.

If we pause for a moment of silence to hear God's voice, and we get this "feeling" of closeness, this is how we know God is listening. But these are problematic because they bypass the word of God in favor of external things, and we already know that true change never happens with the external. Again, this life is by faith, not by feeling. Lots of things produce a "feeling," some of them are good, godly things, and other things are not necessarily so. There is no need to try to sort through our feelings to determine which are from God. Why not? Because God is not in the business of dispensing feelings; He is dispensing grace and truth. And those things are what they are aside from any feelings, or lack thereof.

I want to return to the book I quoted earlier. If you recall, he just wanted to "feel something" when he was praying. Then he continues: **"Then, in a series of events, some very surprising things happened in my family's life. ...I genuinely felt like someone had not just heard my prayers, but was responding to them.** I was having an experience of God's presence in my life that felt real, dynamic and unpredictable. And it was wonderful."

If you look at the part in bold, I think he has it backwards. Prayer is not a feeling or “a series of events” that makes us know God is responding to us. We are not waiting for God to confirm what we are doing; God is waiting on us to confirm what He is doing. We have it backwards. Prayer is about us responding to what God has already said in His word. That makes God the initiator of our prayers.

I completely understand what this person was after, and I am not ascribing any malicious intent; in fact quite the opposite. But is that a proper description of prayer? I think not, and I'll tell you why. We are not supposed to search for a feeling so we can know we are being heard. And we are certainly not looking at physical circumstances to confirm God's presence. To put our confidence in a feeling is to trust in our flesh.

Just because a series of surprising events take place or, we “feel” God's presence; is that how we know it's God? After all, Satan is a great counterfeiter.

But here is the point: once we learn that prayer is responding to what God has said in His word, we will understand that we are not looking for a feeling and we don't need a series of events to convince us that God hears us; that He is present with us, or that He loves us deeply. We already know that. What else should we require God to do in addition to all He has already done?

In the book, *The Searching of the Heart*, chapter 2 will detail exactly how to do this. There are three ways that are explained in that chapter, beginning with the simplest and easiest way to pray the scriptures. That chapter will give examples of all three ways to pray the scriptures, starting with the easiest. Then, as you get accustomed to it, we will introduce two more ways

that require a little more prayer “skill.” But it is not hard, don’t think that. But, it is very exciting, especially as you see your prayer life take on the form it was meant to take. The last thing I want to say is that this is not just valuable from the standpoint of having a prayer life, but it is valuable from the standpoint of understanding the scriptures. Read chapter 2 and you will see what I mean.

Session Three: Defining Prayer, cont.

In this session, I am going to give you two more definitions of prayer.

Definition: Prayer is responding to what God is doing.

I want to flesh this definition out, but let's look at this limited definition first. To know what God is doing, we must know who we are and the time in which we are living. Then, we must identify the scriptures that pertain particularly to us. From those scriptures we will know how God is dealing with us and we can discern God's will.

So, who are we? We are members of the body of Christ, in distinction from being Israelites. Collectively, all the individuals who are "saved" today are part of the new creature which the Bible calls "the body of Christ." That is who you are, and you need to know that.

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

What is the time in which we are living? We are living in the time of the Mystery of Christ, in distinction from God's Prophetic Program. The Bible calls this the dispensation of the grace of God.

Ephesians 3:2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

What are the scriptures which pertain to us? While we should learn the whole Bible, the scriptures that are specifically to us and about us are the apostle Paul's epistles of Romans – Philemon. The process of identifying which scriptures apply to which program is called "rightly dividing the word."

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The books of Romans – Philemon are the only books in our Bible which are written to the body of Christ, who are part of God's secret program for Gentiles, the Mystery of Christ.

What do those scriptures tell us about how God is dealing with us? They tell us that God is dealing with us out of grace, in distinction from the law. Therefore, we are not under a law contract (performance contract) like the nation of Israel was in time past.

If we confuse the programs, when bad things happen to us, we find ourselves “confessing our sins” so God will take away the punishments. But this is how God dealt with Israel under the law, not the body of Christ under grace.

I've heard those sermons that say tornadoes and hurricanes are God's judgment on America. One says God is judging the nation for abortions. Another says God is judging America for not being a friend to Israel, and on and on it goes. Everyone has an idea why God is doing these things.

The truth is God isn't doing any of them. Why not? First of all, because the scripture outright tells us that God is not imputing men's sins unto them during their lifetime in this dispensation of grace. It is the “goodness of God” which is being used to bring men to Christ today, not the judgments of the Law. Look what the scripture says to a man who is rejecting God's offer of salvation.

Romans 2:4 Or despisest thou **the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering**; not knowing that **the goodness of God** leadeth thee to repentance?

Because God is forestalling judgment by dealing with the world under grace, this dispensation of grace is known as a time of longsuffering. Longsuffering in what? God is being longsuffering in demonstrating his wrath against sin.

Romans 9:22 *What if God*, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, **endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath** fitted to destruction:

It is not that God is not angry with sin in this dispensation of grace, but He has chosen to deal with the unsaved world during this dispensation of grace by enduring their sin and rejection of Christ with much longsuffering. He demonstrates that forbearance and longsuffering by not visiting their sins upon them during their lifetime.

Do you realize the implications of that? It means that the bad things which are happening are not judgments from God for sins. God is not punishing the unsaved by bringing punishments upon them, and He is not punishing Christians for their sinful behaviors either. If we don't understand this, how can we correctly pray about these kinds of things?

Paul's 13 epistles tell us how God is dealing with us, and they reveal God's will for us as members of the body of Christ. Therefore, our model for prayer should come from the scriptures which are specifically to us and about us. In other words, if we are to pray according to God's will, we must know what that will is, and where to find it. It is found in Paul's epistles.

We are under grace, which means God is dealing with us differently, and that means that the way we pray is different and the things we pray for are different.

Let's talk a bit about how God is working with us today. We need to know this if we are going to look at prayer as our response to what God is doing today, in this dispensation of grace. What is God doing today? God is doing spiritual things in our inner man; not physical, outward things.

We have already seen how God, in the time of Israel's program, blessed them with physical blessings if they obeyed His law. But the entire dispensation of grace concerns spiritual things. Everything that God is doing today is designed for the spiritual realm, not the physical realm.

For example, we are engaged in a war today, but it is a spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.

Standing against the wiles of the devil, and wrestling against spiritual wickedness constitute a spiritual battle. It should come as no surprise that if our warfare were spiritual, then our weapons would also be spiritual.

2 Corinthians 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴ (**For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal**, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) ⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and **bringing into captivity every thought** to the obedience of Christ;

Those strongholds we are supposed to be pulling down are not physical; they cannot be seen with our eyes. You might see the effects of these strongholds in someone's actions, but the strongholds themselves are spiritual in nature. Where are these strongholds?

The war takes place in our minds, which is a part of our soul. That is where the strongholds are erected.

Our enemy is spiritual. The warfare is spiritual. Where it takes place is spiritual. The weapons being used are spiritual. Our armor is spiritual. Our victory is spiritual.

Next, I want us to examine three of Paul's longest prayers and take note of what is in them. Paul's prayers are different from the prayers from Israel's program because they reflect the mystery of Christ.

In chapter 4 of *The Searching of the Heart*, we detail the kind of things that Paul tells us God is actively doing right now, in this dispensation of grace. So, I encourage you to read that chapter so you can see how Paul uses those things to guide his own prayer life. We can do the same thing in our prayer life.

Now, I want to flesh out that second definition a little.

Definition: Prayer is our response to what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do in the future.

I am not just talking about "time past, but now, and the ages to come," but I am primarily talking about this dispensation of grace of which we are a part.

An example of responding to God for something He has done would pertain to your justification and your new identity in connection with it. It would concern the mercies of God which you received because you are in Christ. It would concern the

Spirit of God who took up residence in you upon your faith in Christ, and the fact that the Spirit baptized you into Christ. It would include your new identity in Christ in connection with your sanctification.

Here is how it would work: Knowing that the doctrine of your justification is found primarily in Romans 4-5, go back to those chapters and begin reading them, one verse at a time, and respond to God like you are sitting with Him in your home and He is telling you this. Then, you talk back to Him in response to what He has done for you in the past.

Do you think God would like to hear from you about the justification that He gave you in Christ in response to your faith? Of course He would.

For example, respond to God out of Romans 4:5.

Romans 4:5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Heavenly Father, thank you for my justification. I wasn't justified by my works, I never could be, for that would require perfection. I believed on Your Son, Jesus, which means that I am trusting what He did on the cross to satisfy your righteous justice against me as a sinner. When I put my faith in what Jesus did for me, You counted my faith for righteousness. Even though I was ungodly, because I believed on Christ, You justified me. You gave me a positional righteousness in Your Son that ensures that I have eternal life.

What does this kind of praying accomplish? It establishes our justified position in Christ in our mind, and the more we respond to God about it, the deeper our justification is established in us. This "establishment" serves as doctrinal

“armor” that protects us from the attacks that are designed to make us doubt our salvation, doubt our righteous standing before God, etc.

The more we pray about what God has done in justifying us the more the truth of scripture is ingrained in our mind, in our inner man. And we want that, we need the truth of our justification to have deep roots in us. Why? Because we don’t want these truths to only be in our knowledge, we want them to become so deep-seated that they become a part of us; we want them to shape us and transform the way we think.

The more we pray about what God has done when he justified us, the more we will come to understand about our justification, and the more we will be transformed by that doctrine. The more any doctrine is ingrained into our minds, 1) the greater will be our capacity to discover new truths, 2) the deeper will be our insight about the things we already know, and 3) our ability to discern subtle doctrinal errors will be enhanced.

The results are same when we respond to what God is doing, and when we pray about what God has said He will do in the future.

Before we leave this definition, I want to give you one more benefit to this kind of praying. This is the kind of praying that will deepen your relationship with God. Instead of wondering if God is hearing your prayers and having that negatively impact your relationship to God, start praying by responding to what God has said in His word, to what God has done, to what God is doing, and to what God is going to do.

And I guess we ought to give an example of that last one, responding to what God has said He will do. What is something God has said He will do? There are a number of

things we could talk about, but let's choose this one: That one day God has promised to give every member of the body of Christ a new body, a glorified body.

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed**,⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.⁵³ For **this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.**⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Philippians 3:20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹ **Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body**, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

But the scripture I want us to focus on is found in Romans 8.

Romans 8:23 And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit, the redemption of our body.*²⁴ For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?²⁵ But if we hope for that we see not, *then do we with patience wait for it.*

The prayer: *Heavenly Father, I live in this body of flesh, and it is heir to all kinds of afflictions and infirmities that sometime cause me to groan with pain and discomfort. But You will redeem my body one day, just as You have redeemed my soul*

and spirit. How wonderful! I will patiently wait for my body to be redeemed because I have a confident expectation that You will do what You said. This present suffering has an end to it. So, no matter how my body may suffer, no matter what I endure on this earth, my eternal body will be delivered from all the afflictions and pains which I presently suffer. And I know that in exchange for my patient endurance, there is a reward of glory waiting for me that the sufferings are not worthy to be compared to. And I rejoice in anticipation of that glory for it will reflect the riches of Your grace, in Your kindness toward me through Christ Jesus, and bring You the glory You deserve.

According to the passage, the benefit of knowing what God is going to do provides a hope that allows us to patiently endure the afflictions of our physical body, whatever they may be.

That brings us to the next definition of prayer.

Definition: Prayer is our response to God's revealed will.

And when I say "revealed," I mean revealed in His word.

People in both programs prayed according to the definitions we have covered so far. Let's look at an example.

In 2 Chronicles 6, we have a very long prayer by Solomon. The occasion is the completion of God's house, the temple.

2 Chronicles 6:1 Then said Solomon, The LORD hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.² But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever.

Then, in verse 4, Solomon continues his prayer.

2 Chronicles 6:4 And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who hath with his hands fulfilled *that* which he spake with his mouth to my father David, saying,

Do you notice what Solomon is praying? He is talking to God about what God is doing. What is God doing? He is fulfilling that which He spoke to David. There is another definition of prayer revealed in these verses in that Solomon is responding to what God has said to David.

In verses 5-6, Solomon quotes what God said to David which is basically that God has chosen Jerusalem to put His name, and David to ruler over Israel. Verses 7-9 say that David wanted to build a house for God, but God said “no” to David, but that He would allow Solomon to build His house. We take up the prayer in verse 10.

2 Chronicles 6: 10 The LORD therefore hath performed his word that he hath spoken: for I am risen up in the room of David my father, and am set on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.¹¹ And in it have I put the ark, wherein *is* the covenant of the LORD, that he made with the children of Israel.

Can you see that Solomon is talking to God about what God had already said to his father, David. Solomon’s prayer is his response to accomplishing God’s will.

In verse 16, Solomon is praying about what God said He would do.

2 Chronicles 6:16 Now therefore, O LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit upon the throne of Israel; yet so that thy children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me.

As we skip down a little further in the prayer, we see Solomon responding to what God said back in Leviticus 26, where God said if the people of Israel break His law, they will be punished until they repent, confess and return to God and keep his law.

Leviticus 26:14 **But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments;** ¹⁵ And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, *but that ye break my covenant:* ¹⁶ I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. ¹⁷ **And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies:** they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.

Does Solomon know about this? He does. So, look at his prayer.

2 Chronicles 6:24 **And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee;** and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house; ²⁵ Then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers.

Look back at Leviticus 26.

Leviticus 26:18 **And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.** ¹⁹ **And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass:** ²⁰ And your strength shall be spent in vain: for

your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.

The heaven is as iron and the earth as brass because there will be no rain. The ground will harden and there will be no crops, and even the fruit trees will not yield. Compare this with Solomon's prayer.

2 Chronicles 6:26 When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; *yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them;*²⁷ Then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance.

You can keep reading the chapter to see that Solomon is working his way through the courses of punishment as recorded in Leviticus 26.

2 Chronicles 6:28 **If there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, if there be blasting, or mildew, locusts, or caterpillers; if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be:**²⁹ *Then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house:*³⁰ Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men:) ³¹ That they

may fear thee, to walk in thy ways, so long as they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers.

In all of this prayer, Solomon is rehearsing what God has already said; he is responding to what God has said He will do, and he is praying about God's revealed will. While those mechanics of prayer are the same in every dispensation, what Solomon is praying is very different from what Paul is praying. Why? Different program, different will.

2 Chronicles 6:36 If they sin against thee, (for *there is* no man which sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before *their* enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near;

Where do you think Solomon got the idea that God might carry them away captive to an enemy's land? Because God had already said this. Solomon is responding to what God has already said. Let's look at one more part of this prayer.

2 Chronicles 6:37 Yet *if* they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly;
³⁸ If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and *toward* the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name: ³⁹ Then hear thou from the heavens, *even* from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee.

2 Chronicles 6:42 O LORD God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant.

Verse 42 has Solomon making a request, but the request is for God to remember something God has already promised.

Solomon is not asking God to do something he has come up with; he is asking God to keep His word concerning the mercies of David.

Session Four: Verifying the Mechanics of Prayer

In this fourth session, I want to continue to look at things in Israel's program that confirm the mechanics of prayer in every dispensation, but this time, we will move forward to the time when God has resumed His prophetic program. This will put us in the books of Hebrews to Revelation. What we are about to look at will confirm that prayer is responding to God's revealed will.

1 John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: ¹⁵ And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

We should be clear that John is not talking about God's will in the sense of all the kinds of things that might happen to you, or situations and circumstances. He is talking about them asking anything according to God's revealed will. He is not talking about some event that may or may not be God's will, so you pray for it and we will see if it is God's will by whether or not it comes to pass.

It sounds a lot like Matthew 21:22.

Matthew 21:22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

It sounds a lot like John 14:13.

John 14:13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

In 1 John 5:15 it says that if God hears us, then whatsoever we ask, God will grant our petitions.

1 John 5:15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

But, hardly anyone pays attention to verse 14, so let's read it again.

1 John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, **if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:**

John, writing to the Believing Remnant (BR) at the resumption of Israel's program, says that they can be confident that if they ask God for anything according to God's will, then God hears that prayer. What is the inference? That if they ask for something that is not God's will, then what? God won't hear them. Now put the verses together.

1 John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: ¹⁵ And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

It looks like God is only granting the petitions that are aligned with His will. How many of those will God grant? All of them. Not some of them, and not sometimes, and not with some people but not others. It kind of sounds like God is only interested in doing the things He wants to do.

And where do we find God's revealed will? God's will is found in what God says. Says where? God's will is found in what God says, in the part of His word that pertains to the particular people God is dealing with, and the particular time that is taking place. God's words are not given to us as an unction, they are in the Bible.

For Israel, do you know what a lot of their prayers were about? About confessing their sins and asking for forgiveness. Why? Because they were under the Law.

Look in 1 John 5:9. What is John praying which is in accordance with God's will?

1 John 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

John is talking about confessing his sins and the sins of his brother.

Let's look at Daniel.

Daniel 9:4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; ⁵ **We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled**, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: ⁶ **Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.** ⁷ O Lord, righteousness *belongeth* unto thee, but **unto us confusion** of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, *that are* near, and *that are* far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

⁸ O Lord, **to us belongeth confusion** of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. ⁹ To the Lord our God *belong*

mercies and forgivenesses, though **we have rebelled** against him;¹⁰ **Neither have we obeyed** the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.¹¹ Yea, **all Israel have transgressed thy law**, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; **therefore the curse is poured upon us**, and the oath that *is* written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because **we have sinned** against him.

Daniel 9:20 And whiles I *was* speaking, and praying, and **confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel**, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God;

Why is Daniel so interested in confessing his sins and the sins of the people of Israel? Why is this his prayer? Because if he doesn't confess the sins of the nation, God won't hear his prayer. What is Daniel's prayer? To understand if, now that the prophesied 70-year captivity is over, the judgment is over, or is there more to come.

This issue of confessing sins in order for God to hear prayer is the way prayer works in God's program with Israel under the Law. Therefore, we see this kind of prayer everywhere.

Psalm 32:5 **I acknowledged my sin unto thee**, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Leviticus 5:1 And if a soul sin...⁵ And it shall be, **when he shall be guilty in one of these things**, that **he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing**:⁶ And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or

a kid of the goats, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin.

Leviticus 16:21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and **confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel**, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send *him* away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness:

Leviticus 26:40 **If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers**, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me;⁴¹ And *that* I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; **if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled**, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity:⁴² **Then will I remember my covenant** with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.

Numbers 5:6 Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; ⁷ **Then they shall confess their sin which they have done:** and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth *part* thereof, and give *it* unto *him* against whom he hath trespassed.

Nehemiah 1:5 And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: ⁶ Let thine ear now be attentive,

and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and **confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.**

7 We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant

Moses. **8 Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:**

9 But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

Do you see the prayer that talks to God about what God said He would do? Do you get the idea that a whole lot of Israel's prayers were confessing their sins? And they did that so that their other prayers could be heard. And what were those other prayers about? They were about God doing the things He said He would do. Okay, I hope we have established this enough for you to see it.

For us, living in this dispensation of grace (DoG), do we have to confess our sins so we can be forgiven? We don't. Why not? Because we are already forgiven. When we trusted Christ as Savior, God forgave us all our sins, even the ones we had not yet committed.

Should we confess the sins of other members of the body of Christ? No, we shouldn't. Why not? Because their sins are already forgiven too. There is no national mandate for us to

confess the sins of America so that God will bless the nation and make good things happen to us.

So how do we get prayer to work? By knowing how God is working. How do we know how God is working? By reading the part of the Bible that pertains to us. Then, once we know how God is working, we align ourselves with what God is doing.

If you were a disciple in the days of the Messiah, what would you be doing? You would be thinking about what the Messiah said for you to do, and you would align your conduct with that. For example, take Matthew 10; they heal the sick and cast out devils.

Matthew 10:1 And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, **he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.**

Matthew 10:5 **These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: ⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**

Matthew 10:7 And as ye go, **preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. ⁸ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.**

The idea we are after is that they had instructions of what to do; they weren't making it up as they went along. They knew what God's will was, and how to accomplish it. And then their prayers were in accordance with that.

We too have our instructions in Paul's epistles. We know God's will for us in this dispensation of grace. So, let's talk about it. Are we supposed to preach the kingdom is at hand? After all, it is in the Bible in Matthew 10:7. No, we preach the gospel of Christ.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Galatians 1:7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

Did we receive a command to heal all manner of diseases? After all, it's in the Bible in Matthew 10. We did not. Did we receive a command to cast out devils? We did not. Did Paul ever tell the body of Christ that we have been given power to heal all manner of disease and cast out devils? He did not. And there is a reason for that.

If God wanted us to heal the sick or cast out devils, He would have said it in the portion of the scriptures which pertains to us. Remember what prayer is: it is responding to what God has said. And if God did not say anything about it, then He is not doing it.

Did God ever tell us to pray, and He would make it rain? He did not. God told Israel He would make it rain if they kept the Law. It was conditional. But we are not under the law, we are under grace. Grace is unconditional. So, guess what? If God was

going to make it rain for us, not only would He have told us what He is doing, but every saved farmer would get all the rain he needed and never too much rain. But that isn't what is happening, is it?

Someone invented a skewed doctrine of prayer which never existed in any program. Nowhere does the Bible teach that God is doing something by grace, but He is picking and choosing who gets it and who doesn't. That would be an insult to grace.

Think about it. Is God offering grace for people to be saved? To how many? All of them? Well, think about that. If God is giving spiritual blessings under grace, then how many saints get the spiritual blessings? All of them? Imagine that.

If God is giving the mercies of God under grace, how many saints do you suppose are getting them? Every saint? Really? Without exception? Yeah, that's how grace works. But here is the really important thing – we know about the spiritual blessings, the mercies of God, our new identity in Christ, our justified position in Christ, our sanctified position in Christ, our adoption, the promise of a new body – we know that we will all get those because God said so in the part of His word that was written specifically to us and about us.

If, in those same epistles, God did not tell you that you could expect to be healed if you prayed, or if a lot of people prayed for you, then guess what – He's not doing that.

Did God tell you to pray and He would give you a job? If you have a job, did God tell you to pray for a raise, and you would get it? If He didn't, then He isn't doing those things. Those are things we want Him to do, but He isn't interested in our list, He is interested in His list. And the only things on God's list in this dispensation of grace are SPIRITUAL THINGS.

Did He ever tell us to pray, and He would send angels to protect us from accidents when we travel? No? Then He is not doing that. And if we try and read into our circumstances something that God is doing, which He did not tell us about in His word to us then we have perverted the truth. And if you pray according to that perversion, then you will be constantly confused and frustrated.

God has told us exactly what He wants us to know in Romans to Philemon. And He isn't couching things in uncertain terms. When God told Israel that the Kingdom was coming, He wasn't unclear about it. When He told them they would have power to heal diseases, He outright said it. And we have no such commands or instructions. You may find a verse that you might read something into, but if God did not outright tell you about it, you are misinterpreting the verse.

In *The Searching of the Heart*, we detail many things in this dispensation of grace which are God's will, so I will leave you to read about all of those on your own.

At some point, we must start realizing that if our prayers are always about something we need, which God hasn't already given us, then we are asking for the wrong kinds of things.

Session Five: Keeping Track of Your Prayers

I want to use this final session to get you to engage in sonship prayer in a practical way.

Have you ever started to pray only to find your mind wandering to other things: realizing you have gotten off track, you started praying again, only to have your mind wander off again?

There are ways to stop the mental drift. One of those ways is to vocalize our prayers; to pray out loud. By expressing our thoughts in audible words, we will bring order and discipline to our mind. Plus, I think there is an added benefit to praying out loud, as it impacts us in our inner man in some very important ways.

A second way to keep from wandering mentally is to pray the scriptures. I know plenty of people pray the psalms, but I am not talking about some kind of devotional prayer, I am talking about praying through Paul's epistles. This can be tied directly into a time of bible reading. As you read, read the verse or passage slowly and thoughtfully so that you have an idea of its meaning. Next, think about how this bears on your own life, and then make those truths the basis of your prayer. Going through this exercise will greatly enhance our ability to pray like Paul.

Let's use Colossians 1:9-12 as an example. Let's start by reading the verses.

Colossians 1:9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of

God; ¹¹ Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; ¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

Now, let's pray this prayer for ourselves.

“Father, I pray to have Your wisdom and to have spiritual understanding so that I can be filled with the knowledge of Your will. I want to clearly see Your will, and know how to live in accordance with it. I pray to walk worthy of who I am in Christ. May everything I do and say be pleasing to You. Grant that my whole life will be fruitful unto every good work, as I increase in the knowledge of You, my God and Father. Strengthen me with might according to Your glorious power. As I go through the various sufferings of life, may I glorify You by my godly patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. May I truly find my joy in You, whatever my circumstances may be. Knowing that through suffering You are transforming me to be like Your Son, I choose to be patient and longsuffering, as that is my greatest desire. Thank you Father, that You have made me a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Now, let's take this same passage and create a prayer for someone else.

“Heavenly Father, I pray for _____ to be filled with the knowledge of Your will. May You give unto him/her wisdom and spiritual understanding. I pray that _____ would walk worthy of being your son/daughter. May he/she be fruitful in every good work and may You be glorified in what he/she does, and I

pray _____ will increase in his/her knowledge and love of You. As _____ engages with Your word, strengthen him/her by Your Spirit in their inner man so that as he/she goes through any sufferings, he/she will do so with patience and longsuffering with joy. Thank you Father, for making _____ a partaker of the inheritance.”

The prayer is basically the same as the prayer I prayed for myself, with just a few changes. But, you can pray it any way you would like. The point is that during this exercise, your mind was not wandering because you were engaged in praying the scripture.

A third way to keep focused on your prayer is to adopt a prayer from Paul's epistles as a model. For example, take Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1, and make a similar prayer for yourself, your family, your assembly, etc. The advantage of looking for a model prayer is that it is easy to get it into our memory. This is valuable when it comes to teaching children to pray properly. The model serves to get prayer principles into their minds even before they learn to read.

A fourth way is to make a prayer list. It is difficult to pray for a large spread of people and concerns without developing prayer lists to help remember them. While there are organizations that provide a framework for prayer lists, I think it is advantageous to make our own lists. This prayer list might take the form of a request on the left hand side, along with pertinent scriptures, and answers on the right hand side. This helps our requests to be specific and helps us identify specific answers which general prayer does not so easily do. You can make your own system, but perhaps there would be a short list of people you pray for every day; your spouse, children,

relatives, close friends, etc. A second page might be for short-range or more immediate issues which would not remain on your list indefinitely. A third page might be for groups, such as your local assembly and those connected to it.

A fifth way is to write a prayer journal. The value of journaling is that it forces us to change the pace of our prayers, by slowing us down. Plus, if we are writing our prayers, we are not daydreaming. Another advantage is that journaling fosters self-examination. It provides for a quiet articulation of your spiritual direction which tends toward spiritual growth. I like the idea of a prayer journal because it not only allows us to look back and observe the growth in our prayer life, but it can also be a great journal to hand down to the generations to come, inspiring them to pray like Paul.

A sixth way to stay on track while praying is to develop a prayer-partner relationship. You could meet together once a week to pray. Perhaps your partner could be your spouse. Or perhaps a couple might partner with another couple to pray regularly. You could even form a small group of three or four people to pray together.

Final Thoughts

I thought I would end with a personal testimony about prayer in my own life. As a young preacher-boy in my late teens, I had the privilege of being part of a church that had a lot of young people who were on fire for God. In our high school youth group, we had a number of young men who loved the Lord and were very zealous. They were soul winners who were always on the lookout for ways to present the gospel. And they believed in prayer. I was first introduced to this group by a friend from college, Raymond Buckalew.

Raymond and I spent a lot of time praying together in our first year of college. Once I became a part of his church, I was introduced to these other guys about my age who were excited to live for Jesus. I can recall six or eight of us, from time to time, meeting at the church and having an all-night prayer meeting in one of the Sunday School rooms. Although I did not know about prayer as I do now, I have always believed that prayer was an important part of my Christian life.

Learning about grace, and coming to understand what God is doing in this dispensation of grace has not dulled my excitement for prayer. Instead, it has taken my prayer life to heights I have never experienced before. At the same time, it has increased my love for God, and for His word. By praying in accordance with the time in which I am living, my zeal has not abated, but now I have more wisdom about every area of my life; prayer included. What I am saying is that the more I have learned to pray properly, the more impact prayer has made on me.

So, here at the last, I want to encourage you to stay engaged with prayer as it is meant to be: our response to what God has already said in His word, us talking to Him about His revealed will, and us talking to Him about what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do in the future. And that is the kind of prayer that changes us, transforms us, and conforms us to the image of His Son. This is the kind of prayer that ignites an intelligent zeal in our hearts to be the sons and daughters He has designed us to be.

Thank you for attending our mini-series on prayer. I sincerely pray that you might have been helped by it in some way. And if you have, that is the power of God's grace at work in you. To our heavenly Father, and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, be all

the glory. So, let me end by praying a prayer for you based on Ephesians 1:17-18.

Heavenly Father, I pray for those who are reading this book, that You might give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of sonship prayer. May the eyes of their understanding be enlightened to know the truth of how we should be talking to You. May they know You in a deeper way than ever before because a passion for prayer has been ignited in them by the working of Your Spirit and Your word. Amen.