



PRAY LIKE
JESUS

Lessons from the
Gospel of Luke

JEFF BELCHER



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Intro & About the Author 4

How to Use 5

Session 1: At His Baptism 6

Session 2: In Deserted Places 22

Session 3: All Night in Prayer 38

Session 4: To See Jesus' Glory 54

Session 5: Only Through Jesus 70

Session 6: Faith That Endures 86

Session 7: For the Father's Will 102

Session 8: During Suffering 118

Leader Guide 135

INTRO

Before Jesus left the earth He passed on to His disciples the responsibility of continuing His mission, and shortly after He ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' followers to empower them to live out His calling in their lives.

To be a Christian is to choose a lifestyle that looks like Jesus in every way. We're to follow Jesus in the ways we demonstrate love and compassion to others. We're to live like Him in pursuing God with unwavering devotion. We're to follow Christ in setting aside our own desires in order to fulfill the Father's will. And we're to imitate Jesus in pursuing a lifestyle of continual prayer.

Jesus, while He was on earth, prayed in a much different way than the average Christian does today. In this study on prayer, we're going to look closely at the ways Jesus prayed in the accounts found in Luke's Gospel. Luke wrote to reveal Jesus in His humanity. Even though Jesus is fully God, He's also fully man and, while He was on earth, He faced the same kinds of struggles you and I face today. The difference is, He never even once gave into temptation. By paying attention to the prayer life of Jesus—when He prayed, how He prayed, why He prayed—we'll learn a few things about ways we can overcome the weaknesses of our human condition and equip ourselves to live more fully by the Spirit and to please God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JEFF BELCHER has been involved in ministry since 1997, including time spent traveling in a worship band and serving as both a student minister and worship pastor within the local church. Jeff currently serves as a church planter with the North American Mission Board and is working to establish Church of the Harbor in Baltimore, MD. He holds a bachelor's in music from the University of Alabama and received his master's in counseling from Liberty University. Jeff also works with LifeWay as an editor for *Bible Studies for Life: Students*. Jeff and his wife, Kelly, live in Baltimore with their six kids and German Shepherd.

They enjoy live music and theater, time in the outdoors, good Southern food, and cheering on the Crimson Tide. No matter the expression, Jeff's passion has always been the same—to share the gospel with anyone who will listen and to help people grow in their devotion to Jesus.

This study contains eight weekly group sessions. Each group session is designed to be approximately one hour, with about 10 minutes of video teaching and 50 minutes of group interaction/discussion.

Each session consists of an engage/introduction section, a group discussion guide, an application section, and five days of personal devotions. There is also a leader guide at the back of this study with helpful tips for leaders as they prepare to lead the main group time. As you finish each group session, encourage students to complete the personal devotions before your next meeting.

Engage

Every session contains an introduction to that week's session material, allowing for a natural transition into the biblical content for that week.

Watch

Each session has a corresponding video to help explain the biblical content. Allow students to write down notes and questions that may arise from the video and discuss them together before moving to the Group Discussion section.

Group Discussion

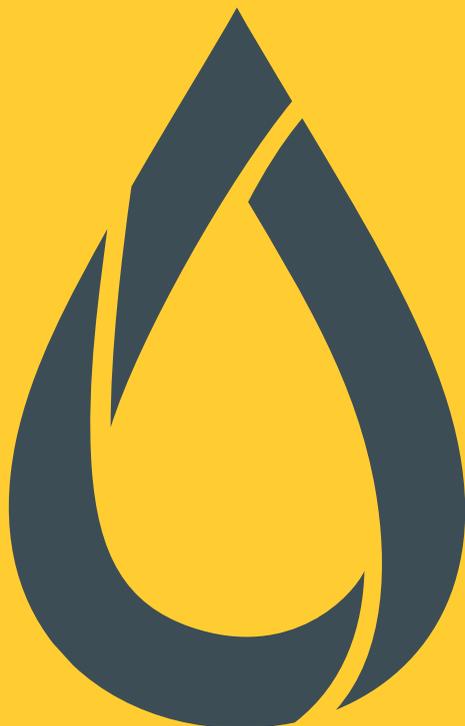
After watching the video, continue the study by moving to the group discussion and working through the content provided there. The content provided in this section will expand on what was introduced in the video, offering greater clarity into the meaning of the passages under consideration.

Prayer in Real Life

Following the group discussion is the application section, entitled Prayer in Real Life. As a group, work through the content provided here before closing your group time in prayer.

Devotions

Five personal devotions are provided for each session to take individuals deeper into Scripture and to supplement the content introduced in the group study. With biblical teaching and questions of personal application, these sections challenge students to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to respond in faith.



Session 1

AT HIS BAPTISM

Focal Passage // Luke 3:21-22

Memory Verse // Ephesians 6:18

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

Weekly Reading // Luke 1:1-4:13

We've all had "big days."

- You've anticipated for years getting your driver's license, but first you have to pass the driving test—which is tomorrow!
- You've dreamed for years of the freedoms associated with going to college, and you'll be heading out of town next week—which is both exhilarating and terrifying!

Sometimes we take these big days head-on, and other times we'd rather hide under the covers and wait for time to pass us by. Sure, they can be exciting, but there's often a lot of pressure. We all know that change and growth can be difficult. Either way, whereas the large majority of our lives consists of routine, ordinary days, we all experience monumental moments that have a profound effect on the future and direction of all the days that follow.

Describe a "big day" you've experienced. What was the occasion? What made it more significant than any other day?

In Luke 2, we read that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people" (Luke 2:52). Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, was a carpenter, and Jesus had followed in His father's footsteps (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3).

Though it may be hard to imagine considering Jesus is God, He spent day after day learning skills from His dad and developing the techniques and muscle memory necessary to build with excellence. Most of His days were ordinarily routine—He ate His vegetables and did His work—and He grew up like any young man. Life was simple and beautiful. Undoubtedly, however, there were days when Jesus experienced things that were especially meaningful, and all the days that followed were different because of these experiences. Maybe it was the day He figured out how to drive a nail with a one-hammer stroke, or He finally got a thumbs-up from His dad concerning a particular style of table which had given Him trouble.

When Jesus began His public ministry, He experienced one of the most monumental days of His life. He'd always lived in obedience to God, but the challenges that lay ahead were particularly difficult, and Jesus' baptism was huge. It was the day everything changed.

Watch this session's video, and then continue to the group discussion section using the content provided.

GROUP DISCUSSION

THE SPIRIT'S POWER

As a student, you likely live with your parents or someone else who has responsibility for you, and they provide the things you need to live, learn, and grow. They know your favorite foods, the brand of jeans you prefer, and that you need a new pair of soccer shoes. Why? Because the last time your mom made tacos, you ate eleven, and because you've complained about the hole in your cleats for the past three weeks. Your parents or guardians are able to meet your needs (and likely give you many things you want) because they know you from communicating with you.

How would you describe your communication with your parents or guardians?

In your own words, how would you define prayer?

John the Baptist taught that baptism was a sign of repentance (Matt. 3:11), and when Jesus came to John to be baptized, initially John refused. After all, Jesus didn't need to repent of anything. However, Jesus insisted, John relented, and as Jesus was picturing for all those who would look upon His baptism—both in person and through the pages of Scripture—the death and resurrection He would soon experience, He was also praying.

Prayer was very important in Jewish culture, and children were taught from a young age to pray. Considering Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews, they undoubtedly taught Jesus to pray. Further, Jesus was God's Son, and we can be confident He lived continually in a close relationship with His heavenly Father as He grew in favor with Him. Prayer was naturally a part of Jesus' experience; however, He knew His baptism signified a moment of dramatic change in His life. Thirty years was the customary age for entering into the office of prophet, priest, or king, and Jesus would take the colossal step from a carpenter's lifestyle to that of sacrificial ministry, and He would serve God's people in a way none other ever could.

Because Jesus knew what the future held and the plan His Father had for Him, He recognized that, as a man, He needed help from above:

- To remain closely connected with the Father
- To remain continually dependent upon the Spirit for strength and guidance

So on this monumental occasion, He prayed. And in that moment, Jesus' prayer became a catalyst for something supernatural to occur in His life. The heavens were literally torn open and the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. In a sense, Jesus was being anointed as the Prophet who would bring God's final and best message to all people. He

was being set apart as the great High Priest who would make a way for people to come into God's presence. He was being empowered to establish God's kingdom on earth, over which He would reign as King.

In order to accomplish the Father's plan for His life, because Jesus had given up certain divine privileges when He came to earth, He knew that He would need to live in continual connection with and dependence upon the Father and the Spirit. So He prayed—and the Spirit came upon Him.

How do you rely on the Holy Spirit in your day-to-day pursuit of God?

THE FATHER'S APPROVAL

Teenagers are naturally better at some things than others, and the fact that we're all different makes the world a richer place. You may be exceptional in academics, perhaps you're an outstanding athlete, or maybe you excel in the arts. Whatever the case, to grow in any of these areas takes hard work, patience, and even sacrifice. But it's all worth it. One reason is because there are likely few things that make your parents prouder than seeing you shine as you live in your element—the things you were created to do. How do you feel when your parents (or other people of authority in your life) express their pleasure in you?

There are basically two types of prayers: 1) prayer for the purpose of devotion, and 2) prayer for the purpose of supplication. This second type is when we make requests of God, when we depend on Him and ask Him for things only He can provide. However, sometimes it's easy to fall into the habit of asking God to give us things that we may not necessarily need, or even things that aren't in line with His will.

At Jesus' baptism, He didn't pray to ask God for anything. Rather, He prayed as a matter of devotion and relationship with the Father. He loved His Father so much that, as a matter of the heart, Jesus naturally lived in continual communication with Him. As Jesus prayed, not only did the sky split and the Holy Spirit come down from heaven, but the very voice of God sounded from the heavens—"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased" (Mark 1:11).

For the thirty years leading up to Jesus' baptism, everything Jesus had done—including the things He said and thought—pleased the Father. He'd obeyed perfectly, He'd been perfectly grateful, and worked diligently at everything (imagine being Jesus' brother ... just saying), and Jesus' love for and devotion to the Father was central to this. At Jesus' baptism, God was certainly pleased that Jesus was submitting to the Father's will and pursuing the purposes that lay before Him. But the words from heaven signified much more than that. God was pleased with Jesus in the fullest sense.

THE SON'S PREPARATION

The world is all around us. That seems absurdly obvious, right? Here's what I mean: in the stories your friends tell at school, the TV shows you veg out to, the music that flows into your ears (and your heart), you're surrounded by worldly values. And these values are saturated with temptations that would draw you away from God and toward ruin.

What temptations do you face that would, if you gave in, draw you away from God and bring harm to your life?

One of the big purposes of Jesus' coming to earth was that He would become our High Priest. This means He left heaven, took on the form of a man, and became subject to our weaknesses and temptations so that He could personally relate to us in our struggles. Jesus' baptism was a turning point in His life which involved His leaving carpentry and launching into ministry, and crossing this threshold involved the temptation He would experience in the desert (Luke 4:1-13). The Holy Spirit, who had just descended upon Jesus like a peaceful dove, then cast Him violently (that's the literal meaning of "led" in Luke 4:1) away from the comfort and safety of like-minded people and into the desert all alone.

The Scriptural perspective on the desert is this—it's a place where fugitives and bandits hide out, where wild beasts are free to roam and execute violence against weaker creatures, and where, in general, bad things happen. In a word, danger! Further, the desert is a picture of the lack of God's blessing—it's a barren place due to lack of rain, and not even vegetation grows there. In the desert, Jesus was exposed and vulnerable, even tempted by the devil himself, and in all the ways we are tempted every day:

- Jesus had fasted forty days, and He was hungry, so Satan tempted Him by appealing to His fleshly desires, specifically food.
- Because Jesus was seeking followers, the devil said to Him essentially, "Throw yourself from the temple. God won't let you be hurt and all the people will know who you are."
- Jesus knew that the cross lay ahead of Him, and the devil tried to get Jesus to take the easy way out by basically saying—"Just worship me and I'll give you the world—after all, it's mine to give."

On a certain level, these seem like pretty good options, at least from a worldly perspective. That's why it's tempting. But, even though giving in would have been much easier, Jesus didn't come to earth to live a comfortable and convenient life. His highest priority was to please the Father and accomplish His purposes.

Jesus' baptism prayer helped strengthen Him for the tests in the desert, and Jesus' living in continual prayer helped Him remain strong to pass every test along the way.

1. The Spirit's Power

Jesus is literally God in the flesh. He is fully divine, yet somehow He is also human in every way. Jesus knew that in order to successfully accomplish the Father's purposes, He'd need to depend on the Holy Spirit. If Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we?

What weaknesses are you discovering in your life? Maybe even things you once thought were no issue at all?

How have you seen the Holy Spirit help you live well in a way you couldn't have without Him?

2. The Father's Approval

The Father expressed His perfect approval in His Son. God created us with certain desires that point to bigger spiritual realities, and these words—with you I'm well-pleased—are words we all long to hear from our parents, at least on some level. Ultimately, we all want to hear this from God, but the truth of the matter is, we can never be good enough to please Him. However, when we live by faith in His Son, God is pleased with us in Jesus.

What are some areas of your life you think God would be pleased with? What may you need to change?

3. The Son's Preparation

At His baptism, Jesus knew that He would soon be tempted in the desert, so He prayed as an act of preparation for what He would soon face. We can be sure that, pretty much every day, we too will face temptations from the world.

What sorts of temptations do you think you may face in the near future?

What are you doing, day by day, to prepare to live successfully through those trials?

PRAY LIKE JESUS

Take a few minutes now and pray:

- That the Spirit would powerfully involve Himself in your life
- That the Father would help you live day by day, moment by moment in ways that are pleasing to Him
- That you would be, through your devotional life, prepared to overcome temptation and live in obedience to the Father

"This is my servant; I strengthen him, this is my chosen one; I delight in him. I have put my Spirit on him; he will bring justice to the nations. He will not cry out or shout or make his voice heard in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed, and he will not put out a smoldering wick; he will faithfully bring justice. He will not grow weak or be discouraged until he has established justice on earth. The coasts and islands will wait for his instruction." **ISAIAH 42:1-4**

Let's be honest: school can be a tough place. You may have to catch the bus while it's still dark outside, class can be insanely boring, there's all the homework—and this is the easy stuff. There are bullies and mean girls, impossibly difficult questions about future and purpose, and on and on. Sometimes life can be painful and unfair.

For generations, God's people had anticipated the coming of the Messiah. He would rescue them from oppression and slavery. He would, as Isaiah puts it, "bring justice to the nations" (v. 1). This means all the world's wrongs would be made right, and everyone would get what's coming to them. From Israel's perspective, the bad guys would pay, and the good guys would, of course, receive the honor and blessing they rightly deserved—they were God's chosen, after all (hint: Only Jesus is good, and we're all bad guys who deserve God's punishment. Faith in Jesus allows us to receive God's favor). They expected a great political leader, or maybe a mighty warrior—basically a man's man who didn't need anything from anyone. The Messiah would be a conqueror!

Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus was born, wrote about God's coming Messiah. He wouldn't be bold and brash, but would have a generally quiet and submissive demeanor—He would be a servant. He wouldn't work the ways the politically elite normally do it, campaigning and seeking favors from those with power—He would comfort the hurting and love the unlovable. Contrary to the world's ways, the Messiah would bring perfect justice.

When Jesus came to earth, He didn't come as a warrior fighting on behalf of God's people—at least not the way the people expected. Instead, Jesus humbled Himself and came as a servant. In fact, He set aside particular powers and privileges associated with being God in order to experience human weakness. This meant He had to rely on the Spirit to fulfill God's purposes for His chosen One.

When Jesus prayed at His baptism, we don't know exactly what He prayed. We do know, however, that in that moment, the heavens opened and the Spirit came upon Him. God had a big plan for Jesus—He would bring perfect justice to the world. This was a monumental task, and Jesus the man, from that moment forward, had the Spirit helping Him to live in obedience, even through the monstrous temptations He'd face over the next three years.

We, too, if we are part of God's family, have the Holy Spirit in our lives. If Jesus (who is God) needed to pray in order to live by the Spirit's power, how much more do we? Let's make today the momentous occasion when we commit to living by prayer.

In practical terms, describe what it looks like to live in prayerful reliance on the Spirit versus living by our own strength.

ON MY OWN

- Example: When a friend annoys me, though I try hard not to, I tend to snap at them.
-
-

BY THE SPIRIT

- Example: When a friend annoys me, I pray and remind myself to see them as God does, and I treat them kindly.
-
-

What is God calling you to change about your prayer life? Commit to two things:

PRAY WITH JESUS

Father, I face temptations and difficulties every day, and I know it's impossible for me to live the way You want me to own my own. Please help me to continually rely on the Spirit's power so that Your purposes can be accomplished in my life.

JOURNAL YOUR OWN PRAYER:

"I will declare the LORD's decree. He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with an iron scepter; you will shatter them like pottery.'"

PSALM 2:7-9

Certain privileges are earned. The first chair trumpet player worked hard and for many, many hours to earn that position. The quarterback earned the job by spending time in the weight room, and watching film, and throwing many passes. However, the trumpeter and quarterback were more than likely born with a certain level of talent others might not have. Yes, many privileges are attained by hard work, but some advantages we're simply born with. What privilege do you enjoy that you've worked for? What's one you were born into?

When people rebelled against God and brought the curse upon creation, God gave, in a certain sense, authority over the world to the kingdom of darkness (1 John 5:19; Luke 4:6). No longer would God reign in the lives of all people—instead, we would have the choice to follow Satan in rebellion against the Creator, or we could submit in obedience to the will of God. However, Satan's power is limited, and God will ultimately accomplish His will according to His sovereign power. All along, God had a plan to bring restoration to the brokenness we've caused by our sin, and ultimately, He'll return rule over creation to its rightful place.

Jesus, the Son of God, is the one God chose (Messiah means "chosen one") to conquer sin and to reestablish God's eternal reign. When Jesus came to earth, He understood His purpose. He knew that He'd be bruised, but that through the struggle, the rejection, and the pain, He would receive as an inheritance the nations.

In 1 Samuel 16:12-13, we read of David being anointed as the future king of Israel. It would be years before his rule would be fully expressed, but from that moment, when the Spirit came powerfully upon his life, the kingdom had been given to him. In Psalm 2, David, in reflecting upon his own anointing, prophetically spoke of the reign God would bring about through the Messiah. The Lord decreed, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (v. 7)—Jesus is the rightful heir over all that belongs to the Father, and from the day He was anointed as the Messiah and He began the redemptive work, though His reign may not be fully expressed, creation is His.

We don't know what Jesus prayed at His baptism, however, we do know that God said to Him, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession" (v. 8). It's possible that, as He was being anointed and as the Holy Spirit was empowering Him, Jesus could have said, "Let your kingdom come! Give me the nations as an inheritance! Establish through your servant your rule and reign to the ends of the earth!"

Jesus received this privilege as a result of His being "begotten" of the Father. He is the rightful heir. As we all know, with much privilege comes much responsibility (Luke 12:48),

and thankfully Jesus was humble and powerful enough to fulfill it. Today, for those who are Jesus' followers, we are "born" into the family of God as well. Though we could never achieve what Jesus has, our great blessing also comes with great responsibility. As God's sons and daughters, we are co-heirs with Jesus (Rom. 8:17), and are called to work toward seeing the kingdom made a reality on earth. We've been empowered by the Spirit. We have the privilege of praying. Commit to living in obedience to the Father, all the while praying that God would give to Christ the nations as an inheritance as He saves people, even to the ends of the earth.

What blessings from God do you see in your life? What responsibility is associated with each blessing?

What is your response to knowing you're an heir with Christ?

Jesus worked to establish God's reign on the earth. How can you work in pursuit of the same thing?

PRAY WITH JESUS

Father, thank You for considering me worthy, by Christ's sacrifice, to be called Your child. Help me, as an heir with Jesus, to live in ways that help establish Your kingdom on earth.

JOURNAL YOUR OWN PRAYER:

“When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.” ACTS 4:31

What we see when we look into the mirror changes from day to day. We have good hair days and bad ones. Sometimes our face is clear, and other times there are so many pimples we can't imagine leaving home. Sometimes we're proud of what we see, and other times we can see nothing but our imperfections, weaknesses, and deficiencies. What do you see about yourself that you'd like to change?

Whereas the mirror allows us to see our physical features, the truth of Scripture allows us to know ourselves emotionally, relationally, and spiritually—who we are as people. Jesus' disciples, as they followed Him, had witnessed amazing things, and they'd even been used themselves to do miracles (Matt. 10:1). However, when things got really tough, they'd turned their backs on Jesus. They were weak and imperfect, they needed Jesus, and they knew it.

Before Jesus ascended, He charged the disciples with carrying the message of the gospel to the world (Matt. 28:18-20). To this point, Jesus had preached the good news, He'd loved and served people in meaningful and miraculous ways, and He'd taught His disciples the things they needed to know. But, now that His purpose on earth had been fulfilled, it was time for Jesus to return to the Father's side.

I can only imagine what the disciples felt. They'd loved and followed Jesus, but then, in the worst way imaginable, He'd been taken from them. They were devastated! Soon, however, they learned that their teacher, their Messiah, was alive. They were exhilarated! But the ride wasn't over yet, and soon they were witnesses to Jesus' leaving them again. As they stared into the heavens, they watched Jesus ascend and disappear into the clouds. He'd left them, again! But not before He reminded them of a promise He'd made weeks before (Acts 1:4-5; John 16:7). Jesus had told the disciples that He would leave, and even though it may have been hard to understand, it was better that He went. If He did, the Lord would send the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples for their mission, and to convict the world concerning the message they were to share. In fact, Jesus said it's "better" that I go, and to expect very soon that the Spirit would come upon their lives.

I can imagine Jesus' leaving left them feeling at least a little uneasy, but to this point, they'd also learned they could trust Jesus. If He said it's better that He leaves, then I'm sure it's better. Based on Jesus' promise they expected the Holy Spirit's arrival, but they didn't just sit around and wait. With anticipation, they continually came together and prayed (Acts 1:14), and the Spirit came.

As they devoted themselves to preaching the message of Jesus, they ran into opposition. In fact, Peter and John were arrested, dragged before the court, severely threatened, and ordered to never even speak of Jesus. Following this encounter, Peter and John went directly to their friends, and whereas we may, in a similar situation, be intimidated or

tempted to fear, Jesus' disciples were emboldened. They knew that God would take care of them and work through them, if they would rely on the power of the Spirit.

They didn't pray, "God, things have become dangerous—keep us safe," or, "Father, we need You to get us out of here." The spirit of their prayer was probably something like this: "God, give us the grace to proclaim the truth of Jesus so that Your mission will be fulfilled and others will come to know You." As these believers poured out their hearts in prayer, the place began to shake, the Spirit once again filled these disciples in a special way, and they were empowered to preach clearly and boldly.

Today, if we faithfully share the message of Jesus, we will face resistance. But, just like the first disciples, our mission is to proclaim the gospel. We're inadequate to make any difference on our own, but by the power of the Spirit, we can be used by God to change lives, and this depends in a big way on our living in prayerful dependence upon Him. Pray! Share! And when things are hard. Pray more.

When you think of sharing your faith, what about it seems scary?

What sorts of resistance have you faced when sharing your faith? How did you respond?

What role do you see prayer playing in helping you to remain steadfast in sharing the gospel when you face resistance?

PRAY WITH JESUS

Father, I know that the world naturally rages against You and Your message. Help me to live by the Spirit, that when I face resistance, I may be bold in living for You and lovingly sharing Your truth with others.

JOURNAL YOUR OWN PRAYER:

“Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.” **EPHESIANS 6:18**

Somewhere and sometime, people got together and decided that students in the U.S. should go to school 180 days per year for twelve years. That’s a lot of time devoted to learning. If given the choice, how many of those days would you have stayed home, and how many of those days would you have dragged yourself out of bed and toward another day of book-bagging and pencil-pushing? Some students love school, but many don’t. If we invested in learning only when we felt like it, we’d miss out on the positive effect that comes from working diligently day-in, day-out. There’s no arguing with the value associated with a great education, and the time spent on our educations opens many opportunities for a fulfilling future.

In Ephesians 6, Paul shared that the Christian life is, in many ways, like fighting a war. We may not have literal bombs and bullets flying at us, but we can be sure that there are, in the spiritual realm, weapons being continually used against God’s people. In order to live victoriously, we have to arm ourselves according to the equipment God supplies. Paul shares an amazing list of pieces of armor at our disposal we are to use in attacking and defending against the forces of darkness—the belt of truth, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit, to name a few. But Paul doesn’t move on without mentioning, “Pray at all times.”

The armor God provides is essential in keeping us safe in a world that is fiercely opposed to God, but Scripture is very clear that even these aren’t enough to defend against the attacks of the enemy. In order to live successfully through the temptations we face, we must depend on the power of the Spirit. Prayer is in a sense, our saying, “God, I can’t handle this on my own. I need you to be my strength, my Defender.” Whenever we need to live by the power of God, we should pray—Paul says this is “at all times.”

Further, we’re to pray “with every prayer.” In school, you study English, History, Art, Math, and many more subjects. Further, you don’t just study Math in general, but many kinds of math—Algebra, Geometry, Calculus, and so on. If you want to be well-rounded and well-prepared for any number of opportunities and challenges life presents, it’s important to have a broad range of skills and experience. We should, similarly, pray in ways that will help us be in the best position to succeed. We should pray alone and with our friends, with our families and small groups, and in church gatherings. We should pray over meals, in the car, when we wake up, before school, before bed, and every other occasion. As we pray, we should continually aware of the ways the devil would tempt us and draw us away from God. It’s possible to pray in the flesh—prayers characterized by asking for things that would make us successful or comfortable in an earthly sense. In Luke 22:42 when Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but yours, be done,” He denied His own immediate desires, surrendering instead to the Father as the Spirit led Him. Praying in the Spirit involves pursuing God’s will, and being ever-ready to lay aside our own ideas and desires.

The ultimate goal of the Christ-follower is that God would rule in our lives, and that He'd use us to influence others toward this same end. Victory depends not only upon our learning to use the armor that God supplies, but also on living continually in prayer. If Jesus needed to pray in order to resist the devil and live in obedience to the Father, how much more do we need to pray?

In what ways have you experienced spiritual attacks?

In what ways do you use the armor of God when you face temptations and difficulties?

In your own words, how do you think prayer specifically helps us experience victory?

PRAY WITH JESUS

Father, I understand that I live in a world that's opposed to You, and is against me inasmuch as I seek to follow You. I'm too weak to succeed on my own, and I need You to protect me, and to provide the strength I need to live for You.

JOURNAL YOUR OWN PRAYER:

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" **LUKE 11:13**

Parents, in many ways, like to spoil their children. How many moms and dads have driven halfway across the country and spent thousands of dollars so that their kids can hug a princess and get a hat with mouse ears? How many parents stress about the bills, all the while, they can't help but spend hundreds of dollars (or more) on Christmas presents for their little ones? Why do parents do this? Because they love their kids, and they want us to experience the good things life has to offer. In what ways have your parents spoiled you?

In case you didn't know (and I hate to break it to you), our parents aren't perfect. In fact, Jesus says that all earthly parents are "evil." Wow—that's tough. What Jesus means may not be necessarily be what immediately comes to mind. When we think of evil, we think of someone who's nasty and hateful, and who does terrible things to other people. But Jesus is saying that, for even the most loving people, when compared with God, they pale in comparison and their kindness is much closer to evil than God's infinite goodness.

Earthly parents are responsible to love, and teach, and care for their children, and most take this job seriously. So when their child asks for something they need, the parent does all he can to provide for that need. These "good gifts" are to characterize the relationship between a parent and child. But Jesus says that our heavenly Father, whose resources are unlimited and whose love is beyond measure, can provide for our needs so much better than even the best parents.

However, we often go without, which actually seems pretty silly. When we ask God for the things we need, especially when the things we ask for are in line with the Spirit's leading us, God is happy to provide it—every time! There's nothing that pleases God more than to hear His children asking for the things they need to mature spiritually and to grow closer to Him, and then to answer those prayers. However, we're often content to limp along, struggling with the same old sins that have haunted us for years, because we fail to ask for God's help. We miss out on so many good things God has for us because we just don't ask (James 4:2).

Jesus knew of God's plan to redeem humanity, and of the weight of what lay before Him. He also knew He'd need the Spirit's help to successfully fulfill what the Father required, so He prayed. He asked God to make the nations His inheritance, and to give the Holy Spirit, and His heavenly Father answered.

What “big ask” have you recently made of your parents? How did they respond?

What good gifts (not necessarily “things” or possessions) have your parents given you? How do these let you know your parents love you?

What good things has God given you as a result of your asking?

How do you need to change your prayer life, asking God for good spiritual things, knowing that He’s happy to provide?

PRAY WITH JESUS

Father, I understand that I don’t have certain good things in my life because I simply don’t ask. Please help me to understand the specific things I need in order to grow, and provide those that I would live for You. Thank You for generously providing all I need.

JOURNAL YOUR OWN PRAYER: