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Teaching Disciples to Pray: Improving the Understanding and Practice of Prayer at Calvary Baptist Church of Floyd, Virginia

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TEACHING DISCIPLES TO PRAY:
IMPROVING THE UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF PRAYER
AT CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH OF FLOYD, VIRGINIA

A PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
RANDY THOMAS MCDANIEL

MAY 14, 2012

APPROVAL FORM

TEACHING DISCIPLES TO PRAY:
IMPROVING THE UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF PRAYER
AT CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH OF FLOYD, VIRGINIA

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I finish with the acknowledgment of special friends and their various contributions to my emotional well-being. Thank you, Greg Hughes, for always affirming my ministry and for being a listening ear in times of need. Iron sharpens iron! Thank you, Tammy Bowen, for being my friend in the church office and for being ready to help at all times. And finally, I would like to refer to the journey one more time in my words of appreciation for two special classmates who traveled with me: John Bridges and Kathy Naish. May the road rise up to meet you.

ABSTRACT

This project was undergirded by a theory that intentionality and discipline in prayer will yield valuable benefits. Growing more knowledgeable in prayer practice as well as learning to faithfully set aside time for prayer were two components of specific importance in this project. Such components can be engaged by the individual in private study. However, the position of this ministry experiment is that the greatest gains regarding knowledge and practice with prayer are to be found from intentional study with the additional element of a dialogical small group experience.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This document is the report and analysis of the Doctor of Ministry project: “Teaching Disciples to Pray: Improving the Understanding and Practice of Prayer at Calvary Baptist Church, Floyd, Virginia.” The following pages will describe the full scope of a ministry experiment from conceptualization and planning, through implementation, and ending with post-experiment results. The project sought to engage small groups within Calvary Baptist Church in an intensive season of prayer and prayer study, with an underlying assumption that intentionality within one’s prayer life is an essential part of discipleship. Furthermore, when people on the path of Christian discipleship study and practice prayer, they experience greater satisfaction in their faith. This report and analysis will have particular emphasis on the impact of the experiment on the subject church and the experimenter.

Prolegomena

We live in an age of unparalleled access to information. From highly specified cable television channels, to the explosion of print media (including the growing market

of ebooks), to the power of searching on the worldwide web, we can get a more or less expert tutorial on any topic, and get it quickly. Along with this information explosion there has developed a cultural idolization of autonomy and self-sufficiency. After all, with a little initiative you can garner your resources and fix whatever problems you encounter – and, again, you can do it yourself.

Church leadership in the twenty-first century is at once blessed by the profusion of information on topics of Christian discipleship and church growth, while also being cursed by the endless advice on how to “fix” your church or ailing spirituality. Often the result of such abundant information in the sphere of church work is information overload followed by paralysis and finally despair. For some pastors who have not yet reached that moment of despair, they are caught up in the drive to borrow programs that have worked at other churches, to utilize techniques that produce measurable results (particularly attendance numbers), and to gather the information and expertise to lead the church into the land of prosperity.

What I have described is the condition of twenty-first century secular America as well as the condition of the contemporary church driven to success. However, this may not be exclusively a contemporary problem – it may be a timeless error on the part of humankind. In my description I have detailed how this time we live in features information at one’s immediate disposal. This, in and of itself, is a neutral premise, but combined with a human’s propensity toward self-sufficiency, we run into problems. I believe that just like the “Tower of Babel” story in Genesis 11, humankind continues to this day to seek resources that will enable us to “make a name for ourselves.” Now it is

not brick and mortar, but information and strategies that we in the church use to make ourselves glorious. But we are getting weary.

The mission of the church is too great to rely on our own strength. We have heard the biblical mandates to grow deeper in discipleship and to evangelize, but are becoming overwhelmed by the enormity of the tasks. There is just too much to be done, too much information to sift through, and too little remaining emotional or physical resources.

All of these things lead to a ministry project that shifts focus from simply gathering resources, learning techniques, executing programs, and developing disciplines that will result in religious success both individual and corporate. Christian disciples first, and foremost, need to learn *God's resources*, not their own. There is a time to learn how each person has been gifted for ministry, or maybe to reflect on the “felt-needs” of the unchurched context, but this hour in my church setting is a time for the people to draw on the presence of God through prayer.

A Brief Project Description

The biblical source from whence the project idea sprang is the pericope on the topic of prayer found in Luke 11:1-13. The disciples, having witnessed Jesus' practice of prayer and having perceived that prayer was a part of John the Baptizer's pedagogy, entreat the Master to inform them on prayer. In Luke's account, Jesus instructs them in three teachings: the Lukan *Lord's Prayer* (verses 2-4); the story of *the Friend at Midnight* (verses 5-8); and various assurances that God hears prayer (verses 9-13). More important to this project than the content of Jesus' teaching, is the paradigmatic story of the first

disciples of Jesus imploring Him to speak regarding His practice of prayer. I believe that these early disciples ask about prayer because they are becoming aware of the correlation between Jesus' understanding and practice of prayer and His power and effectiveness. It is imperative for current day disciples of Jesus (following the biblical example) to come to this moment of fascination with prayer and undertake its practice with intentionality.

The time for intentionality in prayer for Calvary Baptist Church was a six-week period in late summer and early fall of 2011. During this time twenty-seven people participated in an experiment regarding the study and practice of prayer. Three groups of nine participants each experienced varying levels of exposure to teaching on prayer. Group 1 received a pre-experiment survey and then six weeks later were given the same survey – post-experiment. Additionally, they were given weekly materials which involved reading and reflecting on topics in prayer. The final component for this group was participation in weekly meetings to discuss insights stemming from the prayer study. Group 2 – in addition to taking both a pre and post survey – were given weekly materials which involved reading and reflecting on topics in prayer. Group 3 – in addition to taking both a pre and post survey – received no additional instruction on prayer other than what they might have been subjected to through Sunday morning messages or Wednesday evening prayer meetings. All of these components were part of the design of an experiment testing the assumption that Group 1 would benefit the most within the study due to the combination of written resources and small group interaction.

The Structure of this Report and Analysis

This report and analysis is composed of five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction which includes a reflection on the compelling need in the contemporary church to engage the topic of prayer. Additionally, this chapter contains a précis of the project, a description of this report's structure, a description of the ministry project's setting, and a statement of the problem (or question) within the ministry context which this project addresses.

Chapter Two initially addresses the project goal and a list of expectations and anticipated outcomes. This chapter offers a brief theological rationale and then turns to a personal rationale. A description of the project's assessment tools follows, rounded out by a detailed description of the project's preparation and implementation.

Chapter Three engages reflection of a biblical and theological nature. The final piece in this chapter focuses on select historical foundations which undergird the practice of prayer. Within this historical context, some specific prayer forms will be discussed.

Chapter Four is a critical analysis and evaluation of the constituent parts of the ministry experiment. Each component will be reported and analyzed in its natural, chronological order.

Chapter Five summarizes my findings and illuminates the perceived impact of the project on both Calvary Baptist Church and myself. Additionally, this chapter queries any future personal or corporate plans emanating from the ministry project.

The Setting for the Project

My ministry context is Calvary Baptist Church in Floyd, Virginia – an affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and the Baptist General Association of Virginia. The church was started from a split in 1983 that was a reaction to the high degree of control exerted by influential families in the parent church. The splinter group initially sought recognition from the Blue Ridge Association (the geographically appropriate association), but was not recognized due to the associational discomfort in the aftermath of the church split. The Highlands Baptist Association (the association geographically spread out to the north and west of Floyd County) received the new church readily. This associational affiliation exists to this day.

Floyd is a rural county in southwest Virginia whose county seat is the small town of Floyd. The town of Floyd is located approximately a forty-five minute drive southwest of Roanoke. The county's population is estimated at close to 15,000 people with no major industry within its borders. Many people commute to higher paying jobs, primarily in Montgomery County to the north (the cities of Christiansburg, Blacksburg, and Radford) and to the cities of Salem and Roanoke to the northeast. Floyd has in recent years capitalized on tourism stemming from two factors: the Blue Ridge Parkway and Floyd's designation as a stop on The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail. The latter was a project birthed in 2003 that sought to foster tourism around the Appalachian musical heritage of locations in southwest Virginia. In recent years the small downtown section of Floyd has witnessed a renewal, particularly from targeting tourism and accentuating Appalachian heritage.

The church split of the early 80s progressed through several phases. Initially the group that would become Calvary Baptist Church met as a house church. Within a short period of time a vacant church facility in downtown Floyd was rented. This move was critical to lead the fledgling congregation to a sense of legitimacy and deepen its self-identity. The next major step was the acquisition of land three miles outside of town.

The core group involved in founding Calvary Baptist had considerable talents for building and construction and fervor for raising funds. The church embarked on fundraising projects, secured a Virginia Baptist loan, and built the church structure without hiring contractors. In the early days the members spent evenings and Saturdays laboring to see the vision of this church building completed. The basement was completed and the group moved into the space in 1986. Work continued on the upstairs and the first worship service in the completed building was held in August of 1990. Approximately twenty of the original group remain active at Calvary Baptist Church.

Church attendance has gone up and down over the years, swelling at times with influxes of transfer growth from other church splits. Currently, Sunday morning numbers fluctuate from 70 to 110 people in worship. The Sunday school program has languished in recent years and only serves around 30 people. Calvary offers many programs ranging from a once-a-month food pantry open to the public, to various types of children and family discipleship programs.

One further description is helpful before moving into the “ministry question” to be addressed in the project. Calvary Baptist does not currently support missions work (or indeed send any significant money) outside of the region. For the Cooperative Program

this church gives about one half of one percent (0.6%) of the annual budget to the Baptist General Association of Virginia. The Highlands Baptist Association receives approximately two and one half percent (2.5%) of the annual budget. For immediate needs, i.e., the food pantry, utilities assistance, etc., Calvary makes its highest contribution in the category of missions: approximately three and three quarter percent (3.75%) of the annual budget. The church is known in the community for its service to local needs and has been energetic and generous in the cause. However, ours is a myopic focus for kingdom work and we need to broaden our understanding of our place in the larger Baptist context.

The Ministry Question

My current assessment of the mood at Calvary is a positive one. People indicate they are happy (and comfortable) with their church. However, this comfort at times suggests complacency and apathy. In the last year I have perceived a reduction in the congregation's energy for discipleship programming and have felt a resistance to demands on their time. Like many churches, it is difficult to get people to gather for Church Council meetings, committee meetings, and generally any meeting that involves planning and seeking vision for the future direction of the church's ministries. It is a good fellowship, but one that has entered into a maintenance mode.

It is my contention that this maintenance mode is a natural part of the growth cycle. The church is still young, but it has passed through the initial newness and energy that attends the youth phase. With the passing of this phase there is a maturity which

recognizes that the frenzied activities of years past will no longer satisfy. This church is not looking for flashy new ideas, but rather seems perfectly poised to go deeper in what really matters – intimacy with God.

With these things in mind, nothing could be more appropriate to this church than efforts to become reconnected to God in prayer. Prayer is that simple answer (though it may have complexities and be a struggle of self-discipline) which cuts through the apathy and burnout of this congregation. Though the importance of this solution (understanding and practicing prayer) may not be intuitively grasped by all, it is in fact the starting place for not only a ministry project, but is the foundation for what will later lead to the deepening and broadening of the spirituality of Calvary Baptist Church.

CHAPTER TWO

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The initial pages of this chapter will address the goal of this project and will then merge into a discussion of the project's rationale. After a brief description of the assessment tools, the final piece for this chapter will be a description of the project implementation.

The Project Goal

The inspiration for this project came from an intense hermeneutical analysis of Luke 11:1-13 undertaken in a Doctor of Ministry seminar. Prior to this seminar, my intentions had been to engage a ministry project on the topic of church growth through the implementation of a creative small group ministry. However, the angle from which I was approaching the ministry question (a question regarding my church's apathy and its diminishing capacity to take part in the Kingdom's advance), seemed fraught with 21st century church growth values and a high degree of "trendiness." My exposure to the recurring themes in Luke fostered much reflection about the values and emphases of this early Christian author. By considering what things were important to Luke, I became captivated by something I perceived as paramount and timeless in the writer's constant

attention to the theme of prayer. Consistently throughout the Luke-Acts writings the focus rests upon reliance on God and His Spirit's work. In bathing their ministries in prayer, Jesus and later the early disciples, demonstrate that efficacious ministry begins and is sustained throughout by a relationship and direct conversation with God. As I considered discipleship issues in my current context, I came to a logical conclusion that intimacy and relationship with God through prayer was prerequisite to many other desirable goals, such as church growth through small group ministry. The starting place for Calvary Baptist was by necessity the same place of origin from Luke's perspective: the Divine offer of relationship and resources apprehended through prayer.

Early on, there was a danger that having uncovered this primary topic for disciples of all ages – prayer – that one could engage an experiment designed entirely to improve everyone's technique in prayer. Jesus Himself seems to offer the disciples very little in terms of technique in His response to their request for teaching on prayer. Joel B. Green's voice became a guide in helping me to view the prayer topic properly as he states regarding Luke 11:1-13, "Luke shaped this narrative unit not with an eye to the "how-to" of prayer, but with a central emphasis on the worldview leading to and informing prayer."¹ Green adds that the critical worldview being developed is "the identification of God as the Father whose graciousness is realized in his provision of what is needed, and indeed far beyond what might be expected, to those who join him in relationship."²

¹ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 446.

² Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 446.

What developed in time was a project that began (like Jesus) with the subject of prayer and even attempted to address some of the “how-to” aspects of an efficacious prayer life. But in agreement with Green’s understanding of Luke 11:1-13, this project endeavored to infuse a worldview “centered on the gracious God, on dependence on God, and on the imitation of God.”³ Simply put, the goal of this project was to teach people to enter the presence of an all-sufficient and loving father in confidence through the means of prayer.

Upon the foundation which I just described, a project was taking shape, but much detail was still lacking. Guiding questions entered the process early on which challenged me to answer precisely, “What is the goal of the project?” and “How does a disciple of Christ at Calvary Baptist Church ‘look’ after having undergone the prayer experiment?” For the project proposal I listed the following expectations which attempt to supply detail in the project goal:

- I believe that a time of intensive training on prayer will naturally increase the knowledge and aptitude of the participants in various forms of prayer.
- I believe that the amount of time spent in prayer individually and corporately will increase.
- I believe that the participants will report greater satisfaction in their prayer lives.
- I believe that the participants will grow secure in their spiritual lives having recognized the character of the loving heavenly father.

³ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 440.

- I believe that participants will learn a sense of abiding “centeredness” when returning to God time and again in prayer.
- I believe that the participants will be emboldened with a new worldview that may be described as “impossibility thinking.” God is a gracious provider who will take us beyond our own expectations to achieve that which is impossible in human strength.
- I believe that the congregation will (after this experiment) place utmost importance on prayer as a primary and essential practice of disciples.
- I believe that more corporate prayer will be enjoined in the services and that various programs and studies will be a result of this experiment, e.g., a Prayer Council, the Bible study reverting to a prayer meeting (at least in part), various studies in prayer, etc.
- I believe we will become a praying church vitally connected to each other by sharing our prayer concerns and believing for God’s intervention.
- I believe we will grow healthier and more prosperous as we locate ourselves under the leadership of our heavenly father.
- I believe we will be transformed by this experiment.

The Rationale for the Project

In essence, the rationale for engaging a project in prayer was the compelling idea of transformation. So many activities of my church (or most churches in my experience) lack transformative power stemming from a supernatural source: the divine-human

relationship. It is our humanness which always sends us in search for something better – a better religious experience, a better church, a better me – and it is our humanness that always focuses on garnering the tools or techniques of self-betterment. But self-betterment is a far cry from what we deeply desire and what the world must observe in Christians: transformation.

Transformation may seem to be a nebulous goal, but it is one in which theologians and philosophers have always engaged. Paul eloquently describes a process of transformation in his second letter to the congregation at Corinth. We pick it up late in his lengthy discourse in order to focus tightly on the concept presented in verse eighteen – transformation by exposure to God’s glorious presence.

...whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:16-18)⁴

In a very similar vein, William of St. Thierry in the twelfth century wrote:

For the soul’s sense is love; by love it perceives whatever it perceives. When the soul reaches out in love to anything, a certain change takes place in it by which it is transmuted into the object loved; it does not become of the same nature as that object, but by its affection it is conformed to what it loves. *Meditation 3:8*

Theology in the middle ages was replete with Greek philosophical concepts.

William of St. Thierry was standing in a theological tradition that was both biblical and philosophical. There is an intriguing concept from ancient Greek philosophy that holds

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references are taken from [New American Standard].

*like follows like*⁵ – an idea that there is not only a connection, but an influential relationship between an archetype and all subsequent types. In the case of God being the supreme archetype, contemplation of Him – and reflection on truth – yields a change in the contemplator. In the case of Paul’s writing, I do not suggest that he passed on Greek philosophical concepts in his theology, but I do believe that there has been an abiding theological/philosophical concept for millennia, namely that approaching a glorious God will have naturally transformative consequences.

Continuing on in this discussion of transformation, one of the primary ways that we approach God (seeking transformation) is through various forms of prayer. Madame Guyon espouses as much when she says,

Prayer is the key of perfection and of sovereign happiness; it is the efficacious means of getting rid of all vices and of acquiring all virtues; for the way to become perfect is to live in the presence of God. He tells us this Himself: “Walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Gen. xvii. 1). Prayer alone can bring you into His presence, and keep you there continually.⁶

This experiment was conceptualized to reach for this ideal of transformation, and the means to that end were to first cultivate the participants’ aptitude in prayer and to (at least in the short term) increase the raw amount of time spent seeking and engaging God. Thus, the goal of this experiment was to go right for the heart of transformation – the presence of God.

⁵ The concept of “like follows like” was such a general and pervasive tenet in ancient Greek philosophy that potential citations are numerous. One such citation is found in: Plato, *The Phaedrus*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, Kindle edition, 64%.

⁶ Jeanne Guyon, *A Short Method of Prayer* (London: Ballantyne, 1875), Electronic edition, 13-15%.

Personal Rationale

For over a decade I ruminated on a story shared by Jim Cymbala in *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Hearts of His People*.⁷ In the early days of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Cymbala was stressed by poor finances and poor attendance and yet he felt called to focus his efforts on the struggling church. Many people offered the young pastor advice on how to navigate the difficulties and each one of these offers amounted to the employment of techniques currently in vogue in church growth theory. Cymbala could not reconcile to employing such methods and was eventually drawn to a spiritual epiphany in which God told him that the Brooklyn Tabernacle would be built up from the Tuesday evening prayer meeting. If this small church would make the prayer meeting the greatest priority, God would do an amazing work. Clearly, this church and its pastor have seen the fruition of this promise.

My personal rationale for undertaking this project on prayer is similar to the story of Jim Cymbala and the Brooklyn Tabernacle. In my case, I have spent many years of employing techniques which promised to grow the church spiritually, financially, and numerically. I do not mean to suggest there was any superficiality (or vanity) in my goals during earlier seasons of my life, I simply lacked what I now believe is a better and more mature value system. My definition of success has been steadily changing.

This journey of an evolving value system has led me to this prayer project. I do not expect that the “pay-off” for leading Calvary Baptist Church to prioritize prayer will

⁷Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Hearts of His People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 23-26.

be the same as the one experienced by the Brooklyn Tabernacle – at least not in terms of their material success. But I do see that my church needs this core commitment to grow strong in relationship with God through prayer. If we see this as the highest calling, other prosperity may follow, but at the very least we will have done the most important things of all, namely we will have sought to know God and His will. The people of Calvary Baptist could appreciate this singular focus on prayer, but from an intensely personal perspective I *needed* to focus on prayer throughout the seasons of this project’s creation and implementation. My belief is that prayer – as the foundational exercise or practice of a Christian – is the one thing which all disciples must address in the immediate present and grow in throughout a lifetime.

Description of Assessment Tools

Tools for data collection and assessment for all or part of the experiment’s participants fell into two general categories: *Surveys* and *Field Notes*.

The foremost tool utilized for assessing progress in prayer knowledge and practice was the *Survey of Prayer and Devotional Practice* (See Appendix E). Prior to the start of the six-week study, all 3 groups (9 members in each group) received a pre-experiment survey with 4 pages of self-rated Lickert scale items, “select the best response” questions, and short answer questions probing personal prayer knowledge and practice. At the conclusion of the six-week time a five-page post-experiment survey was given utilizing all of the questions from the first survey with the added dimension of a “Comments” section for all participants and 5 questions directed at the 18 participants

who had received guided materials through the duration of the experiment. The surveys have yielded statistical data detailed in the critical analysis of Chapter Four of this work.

The second category of data collection and assessment tools is *field notes*.

A group of 9 people participated in an intensive study of prayer which had self-guided readings, questions, and daily exercises plus the added dimension of meeting weekly to discuss prayer with a group of peers. At the conclusion of the Wednesday evening meetings, this group would then move into the sanctuary to take part in a prayer meeting. Many notes regarding the progress and experiences of program participants were generated in these forums. Additionally, notes were made through the duration of the experiment regarding the Sunday worship services, their sermon topics, the novel forms of prayer introduced into the liturgy, and the attendance for those worship services.

Preparing to Launch the Project

The congregation of Calvary Baptist Church received their first formal announcement regarding a ministry project on the topic of prayer in the August 2011 church newsletter (See Appendix A). Within that writing was a cursory teaching on Luke 11:1-4 followed by the announcement of a six-week journey involving changes to the Wednesday evening service and the formation of a small group for the purpose of highly focused study.

Beginning in early August solicitation of participants was enjoined through various announcements and personal contacts. The original projected start date was Sunday, August 14, but due to a slower than expected assembling of 27 participants, I

saw the need to move the start to the following week. The written materials which were then required for Sunday, August 21's launch – introductory letters including schedules, prayer surveys, covenant forms, and the August 22 – August 28 devotions (all included in the Appendices) consumed the early weeks of August. All that remained after the distribution of materials for the project to be fully underway was the first Wednesday evening (August 24) small group meeting and prayer meeting.

A Description of the Project Execution

Overview

As was just described the project execution commenced on Sunday, August 21. That Sunday morning started a ritual which extended through Sunday, September 25 – distribution of weekly devotion materials to be placed in a 3-ring binder. Through the course of the study, 30 devotions would need to be written and it was an innovation born of necessity which led me to the idea of writing merely one week in advance of the participants receiving their weekly materials.⁸

On Wednesday, August 24 the group, which became known as *The CBC Prayer Group*, met for the first time. After the introductory material the group settled into a pattern sustained throughout the project, namely the discussion of the week's devotions. The time allotted was merely 45 minutes and the original goal of spending a portion of

⁸My original idea had been to assemble all of the necessary material into a workbook to be handed out at the beginning. If this massive writing project had been completed prior to the project I believe the results would have been less desirable for the main reason that the quality and freshness of the devotions was maintained by writing them one day/one week at a time. Producing this substantial body of writing prior to the experiment would have been an unnecessary expenditure of energy.

the prayer group's time in prayer proved to be unrealistic – there was too much to discuss. The small group participants adjourned after the allotted time and went into the sanctuary to participate (and sometimes facilitate) the prayer meeting.

The traditional Bible study in the sanctuary underwent a transformation into a prayer meeting beginning August 24. Realizing that it was necessary to ease into the prayer meeting (rather than simply insisting that we spend the hour in corporate prayer), the meeting was designed as a guided journey in prayer. I would teach, describe, and cast the vision for various topics in prayer and then spend a few minutes in a combination of silence and spontaneous prayers. This would be the standard pattern for six weeks with some occasional deviations.

Detail: Weekly Devotional Topics (Major Themes)

The most substantial component to this ministry project was the daily readings and exercises engaged by 18 of the 27 participants. For Monday-Friday⁹ various topics were engaged with the intention of fostering active learning, reflection, and participation with new prayer forms. On Saturday and Sunday participants were allowed to exercise personal discretion regarding the focus in Bible reading and prayer. The following is the topical agenda published in the welcome letters (See Appendix B) distributed at the outset of the project:

⁹ Each Monday-Friday devotion had guided prayers which were occasionally tied to that days experience in prayer, but more often participants were directed to a prayer guide that covered various topics (see Appendix G).

Week 1	The Lord's Prayer: relating to the Father; simple prayer
Week 2	Prayers of thanksgiving and adoration; <i>lectio divina</i>
Week 3	Prayers of petition and supplication; Ignatian prayer
Week 4	Prayers of confession; Augustinian prayer
Week 5	Prayer of examen; Franciscan prayer
Week 6	Intercessory prayer; Thomistic prayer

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

This Doctor of Ministry project was undertaken for the express purpose of “teaching disciples to pray.” Such an experiment is naturally subjected to questions of “Why teach disciples to pray?” or “What are the steps in proper prayer pedagogy?” or “What characteristics does a disciple who is well-trained in prayer demonstrate?” These are all compelling questions, but from the outset of this journey in researching prayer from the biblical material, to ancient sources which considered the topic, to contemporary writers, the topic of prayer subsumes core theological assumptions and interpretations of biblical passages. This chapter offers a reflection of the various theological tributaries which by necessity feed the flow of prayer in a disciple’s life.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

A theological rationale for emphasizing prayer can be gleaned from many teachings of the Bible – Old and New Testaments. However, the focal point for a biblical/theological rationale in this project will be centered in *The Gospel of Luke*, particularly Jesus’ instructions regarding prayer in Luke 11:1-13. Before I expound on

this paradigmatic passage, I present the following discussion of Old Testament texts that inform a ministry experiment in prayer.

Old Testament

There is a posture of prayer, and it is not necessarily a posture of physical abasement with the petitioner on bent knees and with clasped hands. It is an inward posture, or orientation that is humility of spirit. There is an essential reference point for all conversations with God that is summarized by the prophet Isaiah: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9). Karl Barth locates the starting point of prayer in a sober recognition of humankind’s position in relation to an awesome God.

Every prayer has its beginning when a man puts himself (together with his best and most accomplished work) out of the picture. He leaves himself and his work behind in order once again to recollect that he stands before God. How could he ever find it unnecessary to recollect this fact continually and anew? He stands before the God who, in his work and word, is man’s Lord, Judge, and Saviour.¹⁰

Additionally Barth writes:

Prayer begins with the movement in which a man wishes and seeks to win new clarity about the fact that “God is the one who rules.”¹¹

To enter into the presence and communion of God is the primary purpose of life. It is from this position that humankind is profoundly reoriented to grasp the temporality of human flesh and this world and the everlasting, sovereign power of God. And through

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 162.

¹¹ Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 163.

such an encounter we are brought to a profound recognition: the unlimited God we approach is bent toward an intimate sharing of his self with us. He wants to be known and to know humankind.

During the Exodus, Moses recognizes the importance of intimate fellowship, leadership, and ongoing interaction with Yahweh, so much so that he exacts a promise of continuing presence from God.

Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. (Exod. 33:13)

If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us... (Exod. 33:16)

The LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name." Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" (Exod. 33:17-18)

What follows is the famous scene in which the Lord gives Moses an unparalleled sign of favor – he allows a mortal to view his majesty, albeit from a cleft in the rock and from behind. For the purposes of the theological rationale, this exchange between Moses and Yahweh places in full view this possibility of intimate relations between God and humankind. Additionally, a theme emerges from this pericope which can be traced throughout the Bible, and figures prominently in my primary text of Luke 11. It is variously expressed in the pages of scripture that life is only properly engaged with the companionship of God, and the obstacles to be faced can only be negotiated by the resources flowing from the Deity. We are dependents in a primary relationship that supersedes all others and from which we draw strength and the nurture our souls desire.

There is another highly instructive passage regarding the divine-human encounter taken from the stories of Moses. In Num. 12:1-16 Moses must deal with a challenge to his authority from Aaron and Miriam. The initial contention centers on Moses' Cushite wife, but clearly jealousy and pride are driving this conflict. There is what the *New American Standard Bible* considers parenthetical information in verse three, "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth," which should be considered key information in what follows. And what follows is that Yahweh calls the three together and mounts a defense of his prophet Moses.

He said,
 "Hear now My words:
 If there is a prophet among you,
 I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision
 I shall speak with him in a dream.
 "Not so, with My servant Moses,
 He is faithful in all My household;
 With him I speak mouth to mouth,
 Even openly, and not in dark sayings,
 And he beholds the form of the LORD.
 Why then were you not afraid
 To speak against My servant, against Moses?" (Num. 12:6-8)

Dozeman interprets this story with special emphasis on the idea of "charismatic leadership."¹² In the law, there is a real issue with intermarriage. Moses does in fact stand in a weak position in regards to his position of being an exemplary leader, and yet being married to a Cushite. Of course Yahweh is aware of the facts of the case and seems to wave off this contention. The focus of the passage is centered on Aaron and

¹²Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Book of Numbers: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *NIB*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 108-113.

Miriam arguing that they too are highly qualified because they are also prophets. Here is where the distinction between Moses and his siblings comes to light and here a fundamental tenet is established in the case for an intimate divine-human relationship. Moses is the unassailable leader because of his spiritual posture before God.

First, he is humble. The characteristic of humility is the appropriate starting point because it acknowledges the right order of things; i.e., God is powerful and sovereign while man is dependent, temporal, and subservient. Second, Moses is described as being “faithful in all My household.” In this simple statement there is a great call for theological reflection. The scriptures speak often regarding the faithfulness of God. It could be posited that learning that there is a God who is faithful is at the heart of the growth and discipleship process. When the disciple evidences this core value of faithfulness it solicits the delight of the Deity (Prov. 12:22). So what is commended in Moses (faithfulness) is offered as a critical insight into the divine-human relationship. God is faithful and we, too, are expected to be faithful. It is a picture of intimacy which is similar to marriage. As in marriage, the faithfulness within the divine-human relationship yields confidence that blessing, favor, and persuasive influence will arise out of the bonds of connection.

Flowing from these two is a third point, which is that because of Moses’ humility before Yahweh, he has entered into a special place of communion. Other prophets receive their communications from the Deity as from a distance, whereas Moses speaks with God “mouth to mouth.” Finally, Moses is the one who can intercede effectively for Miriam’s leprosy.

All of these components cumulatively build a case, namely that Moses is a charismatic leader by virtue of his relationship with God. This introduces into the theological rationale of this ministry project key points about the divine-human relationship, and even about the subject of prayer. A disciple must locate him or herself in a similar humble, dependent relationship with God. This is the source of our effectiveness as leaders and as petitioners. Moses' example stimulates our imaginations to consider what the possibilities are when a disciple focuses rightly on the relationship. In this position one learns that one's sufficiency in any and all situations flows from God to man.

Moving on to another Old Testament character of great importance, we see that David also has an experience of astounding intimacy with God. This particular episode is paradigmatic of the potential of encountering Yahweh intimately and awakens in our imaginations endless possibilities related to God and ourselves. The focal passage in consideration is 2 Samuel 7, wherein David – having just expressed his desire to build a temple for Yahweh – is treated to a pair of close and personal exchanges with God. First, Nathan the prophet offers the divine proclamation which retells God's sovereign work of exalting David from a shepherd to a king. Furthermore God will bless his people, give David rest, and establish an unending kingdom. These magnificent promises are an outflow of the strong relationship existing between God and David.

An astounding profile emerges with the Deity in this passage. Within his sovereign existence there is a clear purpose to establish a relationship with human-beings that (in this case) is enormously beneficial to the recipient of the promise – David. God

enters into an intimate covenant which speaks of provision for the present and the future. It is essential that we grasp that this prophetic word has elements of a suzerain treaty – a lord/vassal contractual relationship – and yet departs significantly when we consider the everlasting promise of grace in the ending lines. When David hears of God’s favor upon his house from Nathan the prophet he offers a prayer full of emotion and gratitude.

Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? "And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future And this is the custom of man, O Lord GOD. "Again what more can David say to You? For You know Your servant, O Lord GOD! "For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness to let Your servant know. "For this reason You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. (2 Sam. 7:18-22)

And who would not be emotional receiving the full focus of God’s love, grace, and promise of intimacy? David, who had seen the dereliction of Saul, was promised that there would be no interruption in the divine-human communion. The beauty of this passage is that David stands before God with his senses overwhelmed and recognizes definitively that God is offering himself, not mere riches or earthly successes. David has no choice but to acknowledge that God initiates this blessing from within the dictates of his nature – “for the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart.”

Summarizing, God *always* reaches out toward humankind. It is the outflow of his very nature. This is what he does. He establishes a relationship which entails some form of earthly provision, but mainly this relationship is an offer of nothing less than the disclosure of God himself. God wants to know and be known.

A final Old Testament pericope for consideration is 1 Kings 19. Immediately following the showdown between the 450 prophets of Baal and the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18), Jezebel threatens Yahweh's prophet. Apparently not encouraged by his recent victory, Elijah flees in fear to the wilderness. Furthermore, Elijah despairs of life in 1 Kings 19:4 and requests death from the Lord. What occurs in 1 Kings 19:5-18 is a peculiar account that is divided into two episodes. First, Elijah's physical needs for rest and nourishment are attended to by an angel of the Lord. Apparently, the Lord is sympathetic to Elijah's over-wrought state of mind and body. After this preparation, Elijah has an inscrutable encounter with Yahweh at Horeb. Some readers would interpret Yahweh's actions on the mountain as nurturing and intimate. Others would suggest that Elijah's complaints, like the concerns of Job (Job 38ff) and Jeremiah (Jer. 12:5), receive no sympathy from the Deity.

The focal points in this theological rationale utilizing the divine-human encounter with Elijah are two: 1) God acknowledges the prophet's physical and emotional needs. 2) Yahweh shows himself to be sovereign – demonstrating his predetermined salvific plan and reassuring his petitioner.

With regards to the prophet's basic needs, we read in 1 Kings 19:4-8 that Elijah flees into the wilderness, despondent and requesting death. Elijah then collapses in fatigue only to be awakened by an angel with the instruction, "Arise, eat." Again the prophet lays down to rest and is again summoned to "Arise, eat." After this nourishment he is supernaturally enabled to go "forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God."

In the above section Elijah evidences an emotional and physical spiral resulting from the stress of his ministry. God acts as a friend heeding the needs of the prophet in a time where Elijah is no longer able to even offer an effective prayer, other than a prayer for his own destruction. Once Elijah crosses a basic threshold of physical and emotional restoration, he is treated to a theophany at Horeb designed to reinstate the prophet and assure him of God's sufficiency.

...behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD " And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. (1 Kings 19:9-13)

The three manifestations – powerful wind, earthquake, and fire – are theophanies reminiscent of the scene in Exod. 19:16ff where the nation of Israel encounters Yahweh at the foot of the mountain. Strangely, in each of the 1 Kings 19 theophanies, the author states that the LORD was not present. The prophet and the reader's expectations are not met. The mighty Deity is not present in the violent spectacle. However, Yahweh does disclose himself at the end of verse twelve. Seow translates the difficult phrase *qol demama daqa* as "a sound of fine silence."¹³ The silence after the theophanies is a stark contrast. In verse thirteen Elijah wraps his face in his mantle and goes to the mouth of

¹³ Choon-Leong Seow, "The First and Second Books of Kings: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *NIB*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 142.

the cave. In the reader's imagination is a picture of a prophet who has fled into the cave in terror. Now, in the silence there is a mystical connection. Elijah is aware that Yahweh is imminent. The prophet can only cover his face awaiting Yahweh's word.

1 Kings 19 speaks loudly concerning the divine-human relationship. Elijah has fallen from his position of confidence in 1 Kings 18 to the point of complete despondency in chapter 19. God demonstrates a nurturing side as he attends to Elijah's needs for rest and nourishment. After Elijah has benefited from this period of physical restoration – which is notable for its lack of agenda – Yahweh takes the next step: emotional restoration. Admittedly, the Deity never offers Elijah direct answers to his complaints, but neither does Yahweh openly criticize or rebuke the prophet. There is patience and compassion in this divine-human relationship.

Elijah and the reader are very surprised to experience God in the silence following the violent theophanies. However, a profound theological message emerges from this part of the narrative. God has been present in the mammoth events of chapter 18. In chapter 19 he is not present in the spectacular, but rather in the silence. God is always present and never limited in his ability to communicate or relate.

The summary, therefore, is that God does in fact disclose himself. This self-disclosure is a fundamental revelation of his character and it opens up the possibility of humankind being in a relationship of mutuality. Furthermore, the result (for humankind) in entering into this relationship is the Deity being available for (and sympathetic towards) the immediate needs. God is also present in this relationship demonstrating that he is sovereign and actively working his plans for all of creation. In this pericope, as in

all the others I reference, God is available to provide relationship and support and the guarantee is God's nature itself.

New Testament

In Luke the theme of prayer is evident from Jesus praying at his baptism (3:21-22); to withdrawing to a lonely place for prayer (5:16); to praying before His transfiguration (9:28-29); to his speech to the heavenly Father from the cross (23:34,46). A reader with even moderate comprehension can track this theme throughout the gospel and in so doing recognize that prayer is the source of empowerment by which Jesus (and disciples) overcome daily challenges.

In the Luke 11:1-13 pericope we have a presentation which demonstrates the indispensable nature of prayer for the life of a disciple. Luke would have us (just as Jesus' disciples did) to inquire about this practice of prayer (11:1). We must hear from the Master, himself, how God is to be honored, our petitions should be expressed, our sins forgiven, our trials addressed, and how we must become completely reliant on a good and faithful heavenly father. Prayer is no minor theme in Luke's gospel and neither should this topic play a minor role in contemporary Christian discipleship.

The passage is best approached in three parts: The Lord's Prayer (1-4); The Friend at Midnight (5-8); and Assurances That God Hears Our Prayers (9-13).

THE LORD'S PRAYER

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." And He said to them, "When you pray, say:

'Father, hallowed be Your name.
 Your kingdom come.
 'Give us each day our daily bread.
 'And forgive us our sins,
 For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
 And lead us not into temptation.'" (Luke 11:1-4)

In Chapter 11 Jesus is located in an indistinct, but “certain place” – a favorite expression of Luke’s¹⁴ – and is again observed at prayer. When Jesus finishes his prayer time, the disciples petition the Lord to instruct them in the ways of prayer. The disciples base their request on the precedent of John the Baptist because, presumably, he instructed his disciples regarding the proper content and practice of prayer. There is no clear witness in Luke’s Gospel that demonstrates John teaching his disciples regarding prayer, but we do read in Luke 5:33 that John’s disciples exercise the discipline: “Then they said to him, ‘John’s disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink.’”¹⁵ Jesus’ disciples are unquestionably motivated and influenced in part by John’s discipleship program.

Following the disciples’ inquiry, Jesus launches into a model of prayer with the following constituent parts: an address; two petitions voicing adoration and the desire for the coming kingdom; two petitions regarding ongoing need (daily sustenance and forgiveness); and a “final petition to be spared the testing that could crush the human frailty of our devotion to God.”¹⁶

¹⁴ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, WBC 35B (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 612.

¹⁵ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 612.

¹⁶ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 611.

In the first part disciples are instructed to address God as “Father” – a striking feature of prayer that clearly establishes intimacy. As we shall see throughout the pericope, this father-child image is an essential presupposition when approaching God in prayer. The disciple can pray freely and confidently because “Dad” is the one who is listening to the request. There is a caveat (a warning of sorts not to become overly sentimental in interpretation) to this passage which is aptly articulated by Craddock. The point of interpretative clarification is a call to “notice that the text treats prayer as a learned experience, not simply as a release of feelings. Discipline is clearly implied.”¹⁷ Our prayers are efficacious because of God’s character, but we, too, must recognize that there is something to be learned about the practice of prayer – that form and substance are also important.

THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT

Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'

"I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)

¹⁷ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke, Int* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 153.

Much has been written on the puzzling passage of a petitioner disturbing a friend at midnight. I will skip over various interpretive possibilities¹⁸ and offer what I believe is the preferred interpretation¹⁹ of this enigmatic parable.

The petitioner's *anaideia* (a word that means "shamelessness" in antiquity and is sometimes rendered "boldness" today with positive connotations) must be understood in a traditional negative sense. The man is rude and shameless for pressing his need upon a friend at such an hour. If in fact it is inappropriate for the man to disturb a friend with a request, then what does Jesus commend in this story regarding prayer? The answer to this question is related to the underlying theme in Luke's presentation of Jesus' teaching on prayer: God's character is reliable; he will answer. With this in mind the parable of the "Friend at Midnight" can be interpreted as an *a fortiori* argument or a "how much more" illustration. In the story the bond of friendship is not enough to secure what is needed and the one begging for bread is coming in a shameful manner. However, the petitioner has realized one way or the other that the need would be met by going to the friend. The emphasis in the parable is on both the act of asking and the expectation that the need will be met. Jesus has propounded a bad situation in which he does not advocate any character's behavior other than the expectant petition. The listener emerges from the story recognizing that the illustration was accurate – it would be a bad business all the way around, but the chance of meeting the need for bread was good. How much more

¹⁸ For a clear and concise summary of the major issues of interpretation on this passage see: Alan F. Johnson, "Assurance for Man: the Fallacy of Translating *Anaidei* by 'Persistence' in Luke 11:5-8," *JETS* 22, no. 2 (June 1979): 123-131

¹⁹ See Klyne Snodgrass, "*Anaideia* and the Friend at Midnight: Luke 11:8," *JBL* 116, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 505-513.

can those who approach God with needs (even if from a weak position) rely on his goodness to provide that which is requested?

In summary, Jesus teaches about prayer in a “how much more” story. In the story the bonds of friendship fail to secure that which is requested. A petitioner in the story is shameful for pursuing his need, but he is ultimately satisfied. Jesus does not endorse the petitioner, except on one point: he asked for what he wanted. If a disciple makes a request, how much more will God, whose character is good, be willing to supply the need readily?

ASSURANCES THAT GOD HEARS OUR PRAYERS

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? (Luke 11:9-13)

Jesus emerges from the “Friend at Midnight” story with further encouragement to make petitions to the good Father. Jesus issues a threefold imperative to “ask,” “search,” and “knock” with the assurance the heavenly response will be an affirmative one. In verse ten Jesus attaches *pas* (everyone) to his teaching giving it a sense that it is a universal spiritual principle that always works when humans do their part. In verse 11 Jesus asks the question, “Is there anyone among you...?” expecting the clear answer, “No, no one!” The listener is invited to consider a parent providing for a child’s basic need for sustenance. If the child asks for a fish it would be unthinkable that the parent

would deliver a serpent, or if the request is for an egg, that the parent would mockingly deliver a scorpion. These particular images are used because of a similarity in appearance, but a dramatic difference in substance. A fish is scaly as is a serpent, but a serpent is generally considered much more dangerous. A scorpion can roll into a ball making a dangerous situation for anyone mistakenly reaching for an egg. Hopefully no innocent child would ever endure such malevolence on the part of the parent.

The listeners would certainly recoil at such ideas and, lest the point is missed, Jesus interprets his own illustration in verse thirteen. The argument is from the lesser (human love and nurture) to the greater (God's love and nurture) and can be recognized explicitly when Jesus says, "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?" God's character is again certified as both good and reliable and surpasses even the highest of human relationships – that between a parent and child.

A word about Matthew's variations in verse 13 is in order. Luke substitutes "Holy Spirit" – as that which is given by God to those who ask – in place of Matthew's "good gifts." There is no substantial change in meaning produced, but this variant reveals the Lucan emphasis on the Holy Spirit. For the third Gospel writer nothing surpasses the idea of the good Father imparting his presence (in the form of the Holy Spirit) to answer all human need.

Summary of Biblical/Theological Rationale

The biblical record repeatedly illustrates God reaching out toward humans with the offer of intimacy. The stories of Moses, David, Elijah, and the Lukan narrative are just a few accounts which present the extraordinary opportunity for all who would be open to experience a divine-human communion. Though the accounts I have utilized do not always highlight the practice of prayer, they exemplify the heart of prayer – an orientation of one’s life toward God. The call of scripture is one of reorientation and that reorientation is undertaken by all disciples when they set out to connect with God through prayer.

Historical Foundation

With the topic of this ministry project in mind – improving the understanding and practice of prayer – history provides near endless methods and practices for prayer. It is therefore by necessity that this topic must be viewed with a highly selective historical foundation. It would be logical to search for Baptist distinctives on prayer and its practice, but I considered the contributions of 400 years of Baptist history on this spiritual discipline as lacking in innovation or significant emphasis. It is clear by the enduring place in many Baptist churches of the “Prayer Meeting” – a meeting that intended to focus on prayer and worship, not Bible study – that devotion to the task of prayer was historically highly valued. But this element of Baptist history could offer very little by way of pedagogy and merely outlined an expectation in this experiment, namely that once in our history believers gathered with the express purpose of engaging God in worship

and petitionary prayer. So, with something of an apology I move away from the mild contributions of Baptists on prayer and look to the way some influential figures have shaped the concepts of relating to God in prayer and informed this ministry project.

In the book *Prayer and Temperament: Different Forms for Different Personality Types* Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey explored four types of prayer, referenced these with Jungian/Myers-Briggs temperament analysis, and labeled these four forms with a representative figure from church history. Michael and Norrisey's work was instrumental as a historical foundation for the practice of prayer for four of the six weeks of the experiment. The following are four historical Christian figures and the types of prayer associated with them.

AUGUSTINE

Augustine is one of the most influential thinkers and writers in Christian history. He was bishop of Hippo – an area of northern Africa – in the 4th and 5th centuries. Augustine's impact was immense on the early monasteries particularly in his method of prayer and spirituality. From his Rule of Life, Michael and Norrisey were able to discern a practice which they designate "Augustinian Prayer."

In Augustinian Prayer, one uses creative imagination to transpose the words of Sacred Scripture to our situation today. One tries to imagine (intuit) what meaning the words of Scripture would have if Jesus Christ, or God the Father, or the Holy Spirit appeared and spoke them to us at this moment. In Augustinian Prayer we try to think of the words of the Bible as though they were a personal letter from God addressed to each one of us. Only secondarily are we concerned about the original, historical meaning of a text of Scripture; our primary concern

during Augustinian Prayer is trying to discern what meaning these revealed words have for us today.²⁰

As the authors state, the overall effect and impact of this exercise is to recognize how the timeless Word speaks to one's own contemporary circumstances.

FRANCIS OF ASSISI

St. Francis of Assisi was born into wealth in Italy in 1181/2 and died in 1226. Because of a great spiritual transformation early in life, Francis renounced worldly possessions and became a widely recognized leader in the church. His legacy today consists of many things, but the most obvious is the enduring Franciscan Order of the Catholic Church which bears his name. The rule by which these friars live even today is one of devotion to God, but also one of voluntary poverty. Two words come to mind when considering Franciscan spirituality: compassion and generosity.²¹

The Franciscan method of prayer as described in *Prayer and Temperament: Different Forms for Different Personality Types* “makes full use of the five senses and will be flexible and free-flowing.”²² The person praying in this way seeks to see “God in the whole of creation” and can “make a fruitful meditation on the beauty of a flower, a meadow, a lake, a waterfall, a mountain, the ocean, or any event of nature such as sunrises and sunsets, the changes of seasons.” The person attracted to Franciscan prayer

²⁰ Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms For Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Open Door, 1991), 58.

²¹ E.A. Livingstone, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 221-222.

²² Michael and Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament*, 71-72.

is one who seeks to identify God through creation and to give practical service to people in love. A Franciscan is not one who bothers with abstractions and theories but is rather moved to concretely put into practice Jesus' teaching. In short, to practice the Franciscan method of prayer is to engage the senses.

THOMAS AQUINAS

Thomas Aquinas is considered one of the greatest and most influential theologians of the church. Born around 1225 and trained at the abbey of Monte Casino from the age of 5, Thomas Aquinas' life was devoted to church work, particularly teaching and writing. Though not lacking in deep spirituality, Aquinas' legacy is highly intellectual and philosophical.²³

The Thomistic method of prayer emphasizes "orderly progression of thought from cause to effect."²⁴ People who like solving problems and engage the world through logic and reason excel at this method. In this regard Thomistic Prayer will not seem like true prayer for some personality types because it resembles the intellectual work of study. However, this rational method is invaluable at times for meditating on issues needing spiritual growth. There is a self-discipline and openness within this method which combines the searching of our minds and the searching of the Spirit to yield fruitful results. We turn to Michael and Norrisey's words for the description:

²³ Livingstone, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 577-578.

²⁴ Michael and Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament*, 79.

In this type of prayer, one takes a virtue or fault or theological truth and “walks around it”, studying it from every possible angle. To enable one to get a full grasp on the topic chosen for Thomistic Prayer, it is recommended that one *uses* the seven auxiliary questions: WHAT, WHY, HOW, WHO, WHERE, WHEN, WITH WHAT HELPS and applies each of them to the topic selected. For example, one might take the virtue of faith as the subject for one’s meditation. One would then ask the following questions: What do we mean by faith? What is entailed in the practice of faith? What are the reasons to justify the pursuit of faith? Why should I have faith? What is the value of it? How might I practice faith? Who are some of the people in the Bible and in history who are examples of the practice of faith?²⁵

The ideal is to produce an orderly encounter with the Truth which leads to transformation. What we grasp in Thomistic Prayer must then become the impetus for a change of behavior or direction.

IGNATIUS

In the 16th century, St. Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, which became known as the Jesuit Order. This religious order evidenced from its inception a high degree of mission focus – a commitment to go into the world and serve where asked.²⁶ Central to Jesuit spirituality (which would typically be referred to as “Ignatian spirituality”) was prayer aided and guided by Ignatius’ foundational work – *The Spiritual Exercises*.

Michael and Norrisey integrated research on Jungian/Myers-Briggs type temperament analysis and principles within *The Spiritual Exercises* to develop the concept of Ignatian prayer. In Ignatian prayer there are two simple parts: In the first place a biblical passage is read (not necessarily a narrative section, but narrative offers

²⁵ Michael and Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament*, 83.

²⁶ Livingstone, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 303-304.

advantages). The second part of the practice is to place one's self in the story as one noting detail, interacting, and receiving the full import of the actions and characters – from an eyewitness standpoint. The key distinction between Ignatian and Augustinian prayer forms is that in the first, one is projected into the story and in the second, one is attempting to draw out and contemporize insights.

LECTIO DIVINA

Another historical practice and foundation for a study in prayer is *Lectio Divina*. Associated with Benedictine spirituality since the 4th and 5th centuries, this method is perhaps the most practiced form of focused, intentional prayer – though its value is largely lost today on much of the Protestant world.

A good translation of the Latin phrase *Lectio Divina* would be “sacred reading.” This technique has also been called “spiritual reading” and can be done with any devotional classic, but is usually practiced with the Bible. The process is four-part with the following Latin phrases outlining the steps: *Lectio*, *Meditatio*, *Oratio*, and *Contemplatio*.

Marjorie Thompson summarizes the goal of *Lectio Divina* when she states, “The purpose of this reading is to let yourself be addressed by the living God.”²⁷ It is this idea of God speaking that is so compelling for people today, who have all-too-often made prayer a monologue. A conception of dialogue and exchange are critical, especially in view of the projects focus on the divine-human encounter.

²⁷ Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 26.

Summary of Historical Foundations

Methods and approaches to prayer abound throughout history. Because of the many and varied practices of prayer there was a need within this project to focus, and that focus centered upon the four influential Christian leaders mentioned above and the well-practiced exercise of *Lectio Divina*. However, it must be reasserted that the concept of devoting a meeting to prayer as a key component of this project is entirely based on a historical precedent within many protestant churches: the midweek prayer meeting. A collective memory and a receding expectation were engaged in this prayer project as a small group of disciples met on Wednesday evenings with the goal of praying. A contemporary praying church will find themselves steeped in nearly two millennia of historical precedent.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

This ministry project simply probed the idea of “intentionality” and one’s practice of prayer both individual and corporate. Satisfaction in one’s spiritual life and a sense of power and purpose in prayer should surely not be a random experience relegated to a few fortunate disciples of Jesus. Adhering to certain practices or even developing a regimen with the practice of prayer should certainly lead to – if nothing else – greater amounts of time of focused engagement of God. We in the prayer study became aware of the sporadic nature of our prayer lives and began to label that lack of focus and lack of dedicated time to engaging God as “catch-as-catch-can” prayer. This unfocused form of prayer was unfortunately normative of many participants’ prayer lives. The prayer project helped some of us to see – just as Jesus’ disciples in Luke 11 – that there is a correlation between the quality of one’s spiritual life and one’s intentionality in prayer.

In this section, which will attend to the critical analysis of the ministry experiment, it is essential to note that the data produced are focused on how each of the three groups performed, not on individuals. This chapter is an assessment of that data with a view toward comparing the results of the self-rated pre and post-surveys. Each

individual component of the prayer project – evaluative instrument, document, resource, or otherwise – will be presented and discussed in chronological order in what follows.

Demographics

For the purposes of measuring performance and tracking data about one's prayer life, three groups were formed for this experiment.

- Group 1 was to be the most rigorous in their engagement of the topic of prayer. This group received six weeks of daily devotions and exercises, would meet once a week as a group, and would be involved in some leadership within the worship services and prayer meetings. There was little thought given to the selection of this most active group within the study other than the guiding notion: "Who will be willing and able to engage this project with its demands on time?" Thus, Group 1's nine members were approached individually and asked to be a part of the project, and with only a few initial rejections the group came up to its number quickly. The issues of age and gender were not factored into the selection of the group, but a general summary of Group 1 is that it was comprised of 4 women and 5 men ranging in age from the early 30s to the mid 60s.
- Group 2 was the group who would receive written materials but would not have organized reflection and activities within a small group context. This group, also, was not selected in any profound way other than an intuition regarding who would likely be open to daily readings and activities. Group 2's nine members were 6 women and 3 men ranging in age from the early 40s to the late 70s.

- Group 3 was exposed to the very low expectation of filling out two self-assessment surveys regarding prayer and devotional practice – one at the outset of the experiment and an identical instrument enjoined at the end of the six-week program. Group 3's members were 6 women and 3 men ranging in age from the early 30s to the early 60s.

Distributed Project Materials and Other Resources

Project Component-01: Newsletter Article

The first official notification of the upcoming prayer project was advertised in the August 2011 church newsletter (See Appendix A). The intent in this article (as was the intent of the entire project) was to help the members of the congregation to identify with Jesus' disciples in the account from Luke 11. The particular emphasis was on Jesus' disciples recognizing a need to learn the ways of prayer and subsequently entreating the Master for help. Ideally, the article accomplished two things: (1) it raised awareness of the importance of prayer and (2) it increased the receptivity of the congregation as they perceived an upcoming opportunity not only to assist the pastor in his studies, but to follow intentionally the model of Jesus and the disciples.²⁸

This component of the project was designed with the singular purpose of advertising the upcoming study. I determined that an article which informed the entire mailing list would be helpful, especially when I followed it up at a later date with

²⁸ It has always been my assumption that a little reflection on how Jesus, Himself, spent much time in prayer and how the disciples desire to become students of prayer in Luke 11, would suggest to any modern disciple that they, too, should consider purposefully and intentionally growing in prayer.

individual contacts regarding participation. In retrospect, I see that the article could have had an additional benefit if I had concluded with an appeal for anyone interested in participating to contact the pastor. My experience is that such a mild appeal seldom gets a great response, but it might have identified some interested persons I had not considered. As it was, this component was only used as advertisement and there was no significant feedback or data produced.

Project Component-02: Cover Letters

On Sunday, August 21 materials were distributed to each of the 27 participants. Because Group 3 only needed to take the initial survey, they were not given the cover letter outlining expectations and the agenda for the upcoming six-week study. Group 1 and Group 2 received a packet that first Sunday in the project and the cover letter (See Appendix B) was designed to be an efficient tool for orienting the participants without excessive one-on-one interaction explaining details of the project. Group 1's letter was an introduction to the "CBC Prayer Group" whereas Group 2's letter was an introduction to a "Self-guided Prayer Experience."

As mentioned above, the cover letter was intended as a tool of efficient communication. Though I am sure this instrument could have been utilized for feedback, e.g., asking recipients to acknowledge receipt, or ask questions, etc., too many details were being designed and implemented in the first week of the study to attend to feedback from 18 people. However, if efficiency and practicality were not such driving issues, this instrument could have been designed to be participatory (and therefore more effective) by

soliciting feedback regarding participants' comprehension, comments, or questions. As it was, no data or feedback was obtained from this component.

Project Component-03: Covenant

Included in Group 1's packet was a covenant form (See Appendix C) which outlined the expectations of participants in the small group experience. The primary thrust of this form was to make participants aware of the need for faithfulness in attendance, participation in all group activities, and consistency in personal prayer life. Additionally, this covenant explained that the six-week program was part of a Doctor of Ministry project and by signing this document the participant gave consent for the experimenter to use any information or data gleaned from this study.

The signed and dated covenant forms clearly had a participatory element (in that they were handed back) and therefore can be classified as yielding feedback. The intent of this simple instrument was to inform the participant of expectations in the hopes that expressing this up front would avoid some pitfalls later on, namely absenteeism, poor participation, etc. Issues like the ones just mentioned did in fact arise. Consequently I became frustrated at times thinking, "You made an agreement."

I now see that it is unreasonable to conclude that affixing one's signature to a covenant form will preempt problems before they arise. What I should have done was recognize that this form was simply one means of communicating the expectations. From week to week I should have monitored the group and made any encouraging contacts

outside of the prayer group deemed necessary to assist people in maintaining the agreement.

This instrument represents important values. Given that they are important, I should have tactfully and compassionately drawn attention to these expectations throughout the course.

Project Component-04: Temperament/Personality Inventories

Some thought was given in this experiment to how personality and temperament might affect one's affinity for certain types of prayer. The consideration of personality was not a central part of the research – as to test a theory or anything like that – but was rather considered useful information that would be encouraging for finding a style of prayer where the participant might thrive – and thus be more fully engaged. I proceeded on the assumption that anything that aided in self-awareness would be useful in a learning environment such as this study.

The nine members of Group 1 were instructed through the cover letter to take two personality/temperament profiles and submit the results to the experimenter. The instruments that were used were selected for ease and accessibility and they were the KTS-II sorter (found at keirse.com) and an inventory found at http://www.personalitytype.com/career_quiz_2 - a very brief instrument designed for selecting preferences as described by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. These inventories were presented at the beginning, but for reasons I will discuss below, a new

personality/temperament sorter was visited in the last small group gathering held on Sunday, October 2.

This component of the project had particularly poor results due to a subpar participation and a lack of emphasis. By the end of the first week, only five of the nine members had taken the tests. For one participant, the issue was not having internet. For the others, it was simply an issue of not following through with the instructions. There was also a failure on the part of the experimenter – due to so many startup issues – to neglect any persistent reminders to take the inventories. The result was that very little discussion went on regarding personality through the course of the study. In the final meeting with the small group on October 2 (the Capstone Meeting) an attempt was made to allow participants to self-select from a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. However, two of the four people who had not taken an inventory previously were not present.

Before I move on to analysis regarding the MBTI, a word is necessary about participants and access to internet. Not having internet was an unfortunate limitation for participating in the personality/temperament component of the project as well as *Project Component-05: Social Media Site*. It would have been in the best interest of the group (and the participants) if I had recognized the need for internet access in time and made it a condition of participating in the small group prayer study.

There are two things to be said in the post-study analysis of the attempt at learning personality/temperament types as an aid to developing the small group participant's prayer lives. First, there were many new things being experienced at the startup of the study which commanded participant's attention. It seems that

personality/temperament never reached the threshold of significant awareness for the group as a whole and individually. Second, the experimenter assumed that participants would be eager to know their types and would carry this self-awareness with them to some degree through the experiment.

Knowing one's personality type can be a tool for small group members to understand each other and a tool for self-understanding. As interesting as the possibilities are, I believe that this component of the small group experience was unnecessary for the goal of this ministry project. In the many important details that require attention in a project such as this, that which is "unnecessary" is a distraction. Engaging the Myers-Briggs is therefore judged to have been a negative component of the design of this project. Though assessed as an aborted, non-contributing part of this study, the Myers-Briggs types are listed (with gender of participants) in a table in Appendix D.

Project Component-05: Social Media Site

From the outset of the prayer project's implementation phase there was an awareness of the inevitability of participants occasionally missing the weekly CBC Prayer Group meeting. It was initially believed that these meetings were going to be like class meetings that were both intensive and content-heavy. So the problem to be solved beforehand was what is the most efficient way for a person to get caught up on a missed meeting? After some discussion between the experimenter and a participant centering on the possibility of calling a class member after an absence, the idea of a virtual meeting space developed. After an absence, a participant could get online and get involved in a

threaded discussion regarding the material covered in the last meeting. Additionally, in this online meeting space prayer concerns and various other topics could be presented for other's consideration.

Before I analyze the social media component, I would like to return to the issue stated above regarding my expectations for the small group meetings. The vision of the small group experience as being extremely content-driven with great amounts of information proved erroneous. What in fact developed in the weekly meetings was a general discussion and reflection about things which were encountered in the daily readings, or were simply on the group members' minds that evening. In final analysis it was not a classroom with a teacher instructing students as much as it was a discussion group of peers seeking to learn from one another and to affirm and encourage.

Using the social media site, *Facebook*, a discussion forum was developed as a closed community to benefit the nine members of the CBC Prayer Group and the experimenter. The results of this component of the prayer project were excellent, though not exactly what was envisioned at the outset. Eight of the nine group members utilized the site occasionally for the duration of the prayer study. In that time postings of prayer concerns, reflections about individual spiritual journeys, encouragements, and simple communications about logistical issues ensued. It is interesting that the last postings were about how to continue the prayer group fellowship into the future after the conclusion of the prayer study. Though never asked specifically, those members who took part in the social media site indicated by their enthusiastic participation that the virtual space contributed to a sense of community within the CBC Prayer Group.

This social media dimension of the prayer study is a valuable component for cultivation in any future prayer groups. As I described above, it was a tool of efficient communication which also reinforced group identity. My regret is that no evaluation was solicited from the members of the group on this component.

Project Component-06: Pre-experiment Survey of Prayer and Devotional Practice

The primary instrument for testing the underlying assumptions of the prayer study was the pre and post experiment surveys. This initial survey (Appendix E) was distributed on Sunday, August 21 to the 27 participants which made up Groups 1, 2, and 3. As a reminder, Group 3 only received this pre-experiment survey on that Sunday – no additional materials.

The survey was composed of 50 questions²⁹ soliciting responses from the following Likert items: *Not at All / Never* (1); *A Little / Sometimes* (2); *Neutral* (3); *Mostly / Most of the Time* (4); *Always* (5). These first 50 questions were grouped in the following manner:

- Questions 1-8 – “Private Prayer”
- Questions 9-14 – “Public Prayer”
- Questions 15-20 – “When Do I Pray?”
- Questions 21-30 – “How Do I Pray?”
- Questions 31-38 – “For What Do I Pray?”
- Questions 39-43 – “Beliefs About Prayer”

²⁹ What I refer to as “questions” are more often than not statements. Because of the probing nature of the instrument, it seems appropriate to refer to the items on the survey as “questions.”

- Questions 44-50 – “Self-assessment of Prayer and Spiritual Life”

The next section of the survey dealt with comprehension and recognition of terms. There were 13 terms to be self-rated with the following Likert items: *No Comprehension* (1); *Vague Comprehension or Unsure* (2); *Basic Comprehension or Better* (3).

The third section of the pre-experiment survey was 3 questions for the respondents to indicate the amount of time currently spent in prayer, the projected ideal amount of time spent in daily prayer, and a characterization of prayer time, e.g., focused prayers verses spontaneous prayers.

The fourth section was 3 short answer questions for the respondents to indicate the ideal place, posture, and time of day for their personal prayer times.

The survey concluded with an “informed consent” paragraph to be signed and dated.

Analysis of the pre-experiment survey results (in comparison to the post-experiment survey results) will be reserved for a later time in this chapter.

Project Component-07: Week 1 Devotion Materials

On Sunday, August 21 the combined 18 members of Groups 1 and 2 were given 3-hole-punched, daily devotional materials. The handouts beginning Monday, August 22 can be found in Appendix F. The topics of reading and reflection that week were: “Simple Prayer;” “The Priority of Prayer Demonstrated in Luke;” “The Friend at Midnight Parable;” and “Various Assurances That God Hears and Answers Prayer.”

Each day participants were instructed to engage in various practices of praying guided prayers (See Appendix G) and journaling. Additionally, many devotions requested the participant reflect on the Bible and devotional readings and write out short answers in spaces provided. Saturdays and Sundays throughout the study had no devotion and were much less directed.

The concept of a different format for Saturdays and Sundays originated from two ideas. First, I considered that the participants might like some less directed time to implement some things studied during the week, or that they just might appreciate some creative freedom with regards to two of their seven days of prayer. My second reason for lessening the load on the weekend was personal. Writing forty-two devotions for perusal over a six-week period was a challenging proposition. I decided that I could reduce my load by writing thirty devotions (with weekends less structured), and that this might actually result in a design improvement benefiting participants. No feedback was sought to determine the reactions of participants regarding the altered format for weekends.

I do not intend to modify this component in any future prayer groups because I believe that varying the format has merit. However, if I had to administer this experiment again, it would be necessary to gather data for evaluative purposes regarding the weekday/weekend alteration. I am just speculating (in order to make the point that evaluation is necessary) that some people saw the empty expanse of Saturday and Sunday materials and decided they had weekends off from prayer.

Project Component-08: Week 1 Sunday Worship Service Message and Prayers

Prior to the project, I entertained the idea of using each Sunday's sermon as a time for preaching about prayer – and reinforcing the entire study. By the first sermon I was already deviating from that notion. The sermon for August 21 was titled, "It's Alright to Be Itty-Bitty" and the primary text was Psalm 131. The main idea behind the sermon was for the congregation to be content in knowing personal limitations in view of the knowledge of a limitless God. It was a sermon (if it pertained to the prayer project in any significant way) which could be understood to advocate faith in a good heavenly Father.

The following prayers were part of the worship service:

- A worship leader offered an extemporaneous prayer during the opening worship set, which was customary coming from that individual at that point in the service.
- A leader gave an extemporaneous prayer before the offering, which was customary at that point in the service.
- The pastor offered an extemporaneous prayer at the conclusion of the service.

The attendance and offering for Sunday, August 21 were: 75 people and \$1,179.

In this report I am including the attendance and offering numbers for each of the six Sunday morning worship services. In the proposal for this project it was hypothesized that the church focusing together in prayer during this study would have some positive impact on the attendance and even the offerings of the church. My analysis of this pre-project expectation is that it was unrealistic to expect demonstrable results in the categories of attendance and offering in such a short period of time.

Project Component-09: Week 1 Small Group Meeting

The first meeting of the CBC Prayer Group (Group 1) commenced at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 24. The meeting began with opening comments orienting the group to the structure and vision for the small group meetings. The next order of business was the distribution of blank 3x5 index cards to be used by group members to develop the discipline of writing down prayer concerns. This habit was encouraged so that the group would have a reminder for specific concerns during their private prayer times. The main part of the meeting was intended to discuss devotions 1-3 and to take extensive time for prayer. What happened (which became the model for subsequent meetings) was that the group quickly moved from the structured discussion to a free discussion that was not limited to the planned topics of the agenda. Also, this first meeting demonstrated that 45 minutes each week was insufficient time for the planned agenda. What was jettisoned from that meeting's agenda (and the ones that followed) was the prayer time.

Initially, I had assumed that one of the core activities of Group 1's meetings was going to be prayer involving each participant. I now believe fidelity in this area would have served the group well. In future studies such as this, I would try diligently to end discussions with enough time to pray.

There are never perfect designs with any program or curriculum. From the outset, I knew I wanted this small group to have significant time together, but I also knew they could only carve out so much time from busy schedules. I chose to package their weekly commitment by making the small group meeting immediately prior to the

Wednesday Prayer Meeting. Ultimately, this efficient delivery cost the small group the envisioned extended prayer times.

Project Component-10: Week 1 Wednesday Prayer Meeting

At 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 24 the traditional Bible study began its transformation into a prayer meeting. The vision in the projected experiment was that we (as a church) would prioritize prayer by reinstating the model of the prayer meeting, which used to be a standard in many Baptist churches. That was the vision and it seemed an easy task until the first meeting approached. The obvious challenge at moving to a prayer meeting format was that people who have lost the habit of coming together for the express purpose of participatory prayer (and have become used to passively listening while the teacher directs a study) are not in an ideal situation to take up the responsibilities of praying for the duration of the meeting. With the uncomfortable prospect of my first meeting of the study ending after fifteen minutes of elapsed time and a great deal of silence from the congregation, I decided to ease into the format. Perhaps I showed a lack of courage by not diving into prayer and allowing the congregation to “sink or swim.” However, I was following an intuition that was strongly urging me to take incremental steps on the way to the goal of seeing this service turn into a time of enthusiastic corporate prayer.

The agenda for the evening unfolded with a time of quiet reflection and the lighting of prayer candles – a component of all of the Wednesday meetings for the last several years. Next came two songs of congregational worship and this was followed by

the time of instruction. The focal passage for that evening was Luke 11:9-13, which teaches disciples to be confident in God's provision when we come to Him in prayer. The method I decided upon was to teach on the topic of prayer and to pause frequently for two minute installments of silent reflection and prayer focused on the topic just discussed. This format allowed us to enter into something new – a prioritizing of prayer in the Wednesday night meeting – but still allowed the leader to direct the pace of the meeting and the agenda. By meeting's end, the congregation was encouraged to offer up their prayers and five people participated at their own initiative.

Attendance was 20 people.

Project Component-11: Week 2 Devotion Materials

The handouts beginning Monday, August 29 can be found in Appendix H. The topics of reading and reflection that week were: "Thanksgiving;" "Praise;" "Joy;" "Meditation;" and "*Lectio Divina*."

Project Component-12: Week 2 Sunday Worship Service Message and Prayers

The sermon for August 28 was titled, "Included in the Life of God" and the primary text was Eph. 4:17-24. The main idea behind the sermon was for the congregation to be reminded that God has called them into a new relationship and way of life. It was an encouragement to lay aside old ways and fully embrace God's gracious offer to live in communion with Him.

The following prayers were part of the worship service:

- A worship leader offered an extemporaneous prayer during the opening worship set, which was customary coming from that individual at that point in the service.
- A leader gave an extemporaneous prayer before the offering, which was customary at that point in the service.
- The pastor paused for an extemporaneous prayer at the outset of his sermon. Prayer at this point and in this manner is done infrequently, but was no surprise to the congregation.
- The pastor offered an extemporaneous prayer at the conclusion of the service.

The attendance and offering for Sunday, August 28 were: 87 people and \$1,698.

Project Component-13: Week 2 Small Group Meeting

The second meeting of the CBC Prayer Group commenced at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 31. The intention from the beginning of the meeting was to open with a brief encouragement from Luke 10, but due to a lively discussion that was going on prior to the official start, the group leader deferred. The conversation for the next 45 minutes revolved around various topics including the devotions of Week 2, demonstrative worship (lifting hands, speaking in tongues, etc.), the taboos and unspoken rules regarding worship in our church, prayer cards and when to remove someone's name from the card, fasting, and one other topic of additional note: "prayerlessness."

"Prayerlessness" entered into the conversation when a group member described talking to teenagers about prayer and the teens admitted that a focused time of prayer was not a part of their spiritual lives. This confession of being "prayerless Christians" proved

to be very challenging because we could all recognize that the problem of prayerlessness was not limited to children. The meeting concluded with a quick prayer time where everyone around the table was invited to participate.

Eight of the nine members were present.

Project Component-14: Week 2 Wednesday Prayer Meeting

At 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 31 the second prayer meeting of the study began. The agenda for the evening unfolded with the customary time of quiet reflection and the lighting of prayer candles and the subsequent worship time. It is noteworthy that one of the worship pieces that was retrieved from *Youtube* and projected for the congregation – a song by the Gaither Vocal Band – was received enthusiastically. The congregation was used to participating in contemporary worship that was either played live or projected as a video clip. However in times past, the group rarely seemed engaged. The reaction following the Gaither group worship song suggested that Calvary Baptist had not given enough attention to the idea of “style” in selecting worship. In the following weeks, more Gaither music was utilized and it appeared to meet with the approval of the congregation.

The major part of the prayer meeting was devoted to excerpts from Richard Foster’s book *Prayer*; brief reflections on Luke 11:2 and 2 Cor. 2:14; two separate instances of pausing for two minutes of silent, guided prayer on the topics of praise and thankfulness; and a significant testimony. A participant in the CBC Prayer Group shared with the congregation how he had recently been stopping at a parking area on his way to

work early and praying. He shared how important this time was becoming for a sense of closeness to God and an overall sense of centeredness throughout the day.

Due to time constraints, the planned teaching on Psalm 100 and its accompanying 2 minute prayer time was aborted. The meeting concluded (as intended) with a time of “Joys and Concerns” followed by prayer. Unfortunately the conclusion was rushed. In my notes I made a comment to allow more time for corporate prayer. This problem of “prayerlessness” in our prayer meetings was to be a challenge throughout the study.

Attendance was 25 people.

Project Component-15: Week 3 Devotion Materials

The handouts beginning Monday, September 5 can be found in Appendix I. The topics of reading and reflection that week were: “Ignatian Prayer;” “Petitionary Prayer;” and “Unanswered Prayer.”

Project Component-16: Week 3 Sunday Worship Service Message and Prayers

The sermon for September 4 was titled, “Jesus Wept... And Still Does” and the primary text was Luke 19:41-44. The main idea behind the sermon was to challenge the congregation to recognize the example of the loving Jesus and to answer that call by loving others (especially the difficult ones). Additionally, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated.

The following prayers were part of the worship service:

- A worship leader offered an extemporaneous prayer during the opening worship set, which was customary coming from that individual at that point in the service.

- A leader gave an extemporaneous prayer before the offering, which was customary at that point in the service.
- A written prayer of consecration was read by the pastor during the Lord's Supper.
- The pastor offered an extemporaneous prayer at the conclusion of the service.

The attendance and offering for Sunday, September 4 were: 73 people and \$2,998.

Project Component-17: Week 3 Small Group Meeting

The third meeting of the CBC Prayer Group commenced at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 7. The discussion this evening began in Matthew 26 regarding Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane – a prayer of surrender and relinquishment. Some discussion ensued regarding the movie *The Passion of the Christ* and its powerful depiction of the Gethsemane prayer. Initially the meeting was unfolding in a predictable fashion. This would change around twenty minutes into the gathering.

In this meeting a significant conflict occurred. The group leader was sharing about a personal struggle that seemed to demand a "Gethsemane-like" prayer. Without any warning, a group member entered into the conversation with great heat. It seems this member was trying to elevate personal struggles and injustices to a level which would trump any other voice in the room. Everyone was astounded and perplexed as the tone was extremely aggressive and hostile for much of the remainder of the meeting. The time was quickly up and as the leader headed upstairs for the prayer meeting, several people stayed in order to aid the ailing group member.

I have two reflections stemming from that uncomfortable meeting. As I said, what immediately occurred before the outburst was a brief time of the group leader (me) sharing a personal struggle. There had been a very significant conflict in my life that week and I had gone into the meeting trying to keep focused on my responsibilities to lead. I found myself caught up in the community and fellowship of the group that evening and crossed a boundary as a leader. This infraction was an unfair requisitioning of the group to help shoulder my burdens and give me guidance. I am not an advocate for the leader who makes the boundary line rigid and is consequently aloof. But I do realize in my own life I have erred too often on the side of making the boundary indistinct. I have tried repeatedly to lead a group while still trying to be a group member. I now believe I can take some responsibility for the conflict that night. My weak boundary was possibly a destabilizing factor which fostered the negative events in the small group meeting.

I additionally have to process this conflict in view of faulty expectations. Naively at the outset of the project I had theorized that leading a congregation in the study of prayer would inevitably yield spiritual and corporate prosperity – and maybe even bliss. By this third meeting the opposite of “bliss” was occurring as some of the group was reporting significant struggles in their lives. “Spiritual warfare” became a much more apt conversation than “joy in the Holy Spirit.” My early expectations centered upon the potential blessings of the prayer study and did not in any way acknowledge the other side of the spiritual realm – the powers of darkness. My conclusion is that God hears and blesses our prayers, but real prayer will be resisted in the spiritual realm.

Seven of the nine members were present.

Project Component-18: Week 3 Wednesday Prayer Meeting

At 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 7 the third prayer meeting of the study began. This meeting was so severely affected by the earlier events in the prayer group, that the order and planned agenda was almost completely aborted. In fact, due to a high level of personal turmoil, I (as the leader of the prayer meeting) felt unable to fulfill my duties. Responsibilities were passed to another member of the prayer group. Most of the people assembled did not know what was going on, but certainly recognized that something was disturbing the prayer group and the leader.

The meeting started with worship songs (again a Gaither video clip was utilized) and then moved into the instruction time. The “emergency fill-in” led the congregation primarily in a teaching on *Lectio Divina*, followed by a brief discussion of unanswered prayer, and concluded with the sharing of prayer concerns and a subsequent prayer. Attendance was 22 people.

The conflict that evening was unfortunate and had potential to affect the congregation gathered for the prayer meeting. In a very real sense the schedule and the format was working against us. Having to go from the small group in crisis to be leaders in the larger group was an undesirable situation. However, I would not readily change the format in the future (small group meeting followed by large group meeting) due to this night’s bad experience. I would consider a change *if* I encountered a group of people who could meet on a Saturday morning or another weekday night without this “stealing

time” from their schedules. Stacking these meetings on Wednesday is a decision that tries to balance the quality of the experience with sensitivity to the schedules of the people.

Regarding the leader and the aggressive group member, reconciliation occurred later that evening. In a private time these two, along with a third group member, discussed what had happened and the group member sought forgiveness for what was recognized as lashing out in an unwarranted manner. Following this, the three prayed.

Project Component-19: Week 4 Devotion Materials

The handouts beginning Monday, September 12 can be found in Appendix J. The topics of reading and reflection that week were: “Augustinian Prayer;” “Prayers of Confession;” “the Problem of Unforgiveness;” “Fasting;” and “Prayer in Worship.”

Project Component-20: Week 4 Sunday Worship Service Message and Prayers

The sermon for September 11 was developed in view of the 10th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. The sermon was titled, “Finding God’s Comfort in Times of Sorrow” and the primary text was Psalm 43. The main idea behind the sermon was to help the congregation to recognize and cope with tragedy and suffering. The first major point was “that bad things happen” and consequently we are left with pain and few answers. The second point was that God will (if we allow Him) sustain us through these dark times.

This service was the first one to seriously engage a new prayer form since the start of the study. The following prayers were part of the worship service:

- A worship leader offered an extemporaneous prayer during the opening worship set, which was customary coming from that individual at that point in the service.
- A leader gave an extemporaneous prayer before the offering, which was customary at that point in the service.
- A written prayer of confession was read by the pastor prior to the sermon. This prayer (due to its genre and the fact that it was read) was an innovation for this worship service.
- The pastor offered an extemporaneous prayer at the conclusion of the service.

The attendance and offering for Sunday, September 11 were: 91 people and \$1,798.

Project Component-21: Week 4 Small Group Meeting

The fourth meeting of the CBC Prayer Group commenced at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 14. The following topics were discussed: Augustinian Prayer, utilizing “silence” in prayer as an opportunity to hear from God, the advantages/disadvantages of praying with a partner like a spouse, positions (such as kneeling) in prayer, and the problem of unforgiveness. The meeting stayed very much on topic and was likely an attempt by all to put the previous week behind. The small group was back to its mission – to develop the understanding and practice of prayer. The meeting concluded with a prayer offered by one of the participants.

Eight of the nine members were present.

Project Component-22: Week 4 Wednesday Prayer Meeting

At 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 14 the fourth prayer meeting of the study commenced. The evening began with the customary time of quiet reflection and the lighting of prayer candles. Following this, the meeting moved into worship time featuring videos of the Gaither Vocal Band and two contemporary worship choruses. The discussion of the evening centered primarily in several passages from 1 Peter relating to facing challenges in living the Christian life. The problem of unforgiveness occupied much of the discussion. These topics were relevant to the prayer study in that the congregation was encouraged to recognize how offenses and unforgiveness can become huge obstacles to a healthy relationship with God. The final position of the meeting was that prayers of confession are necessary for keeping our relationship with God clear of obstructions. The meeting closed with an open invitation for those present to pray aloud. Three of the 26 people present contributed to the closing prayer.

Project Component-23: Week 5 Devotion Materials

The handouts beginning Monday, September 19 can be found in Appendix K. The topics of reading and reflection that week were: “Franciscan Prayer;” “the Prayer of Examen;” “the Prayer of Humility;” “Praying Scripture;” and “Taking a Sabbath Rest.”

Project Component-24: Week 5 Sunday Worship Service Message and Prayers

The sermon for September 18 was titled, “Know That the Lord Is God” and the primary text was Psalm 100. Though this text is often associated with Thanksgiving homilies, it seemed very appropriate for that Sunday in September. Some of the points in

the sermon which had direct bearing on the prayer project were the emphasis on the topics of praise, joy, and thanksgiving.

The following prayers were part of the worship service:

- One of the CBC Prayer Group members read a Prayer of Invocation – an innovation for worship at Calvary Baptist.
- A worship leader offered an extemporaneous prayer during the opening worship set, which was customary coming from that individual at that point in the service.
- A leader gave an extemporaneous prayer before the offering, which was customary at that point in the service.
- A written Prayer of Thanksgiving was read by a member of the CBC Prayer Group prior to the sermon – another innovation for Calvary’s worship liturgy.
- The pastor offered an extemporaneous prayer at the conclusion of the service.

The attendance and offering for Sunday, September 18 were: 81 people and \$1,392.

Project Component-25: Week 5 Small Group Meeting

The fifth meeting of the CBC Prayer Group commenced at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 21. Because of a family commitment, the facilitator was unable to be at this meeting. In his place, a member of the group directed the meeting from an agenda prepared beforehand. From the notes of the meeting, the topics on the agenda appeared to spark enthusiastic discussion. In the course of the study, there was interest in the practice of fasting. A discussion of fasting was resumed in this meeting that covered a range from “What are the health benefits of fasting?” to “Fasting is hard because it is

hard to deny yourself” to “Fasting is powerful, but no magic fix.” Before leaving this topic, it is noteworthy that two of the group participants held their first intentional fasts during the study and were reportedly gratified by the experience. Another discussion from the agenda was regarding using prayers in worship. This discussion particularly centered on the group’s uneasy feelings about prayers which are read. To summarize the groups reaction (a reaction I have sensed within the congregation at large), prayers which are read feel inauthentic.³⁰ Two additional prayer forms were discussed prior to the meeting adjourning: The Prayer of Examen and Franciscan Prayer. Many of the group responded positively to Franciscan Prayer and could relate to its simple appreciation for God’s creation.

My absence from the small group that evening provides an opportunity for reflection. The specific circumstance was that my son was competing on (yet another) Wednesday evening cross-country meet. I had missed these meets in the weeks prior and was considering missing this one. I began to feel that my loyalties to the group were blinding me to other priorities, namely attending to my family. As I processed this I also considered the codependency trap of believing that one’s presence and leadership is vital for the function of the group. I made a conscious decision to approach a member of the group to ask for assistance and subsequently transferred the role of leadership for that meeting. I believe that this was an overall positive experience in that it empowered the group to function without the presence of the designated leader and helped me to maintain a healthy balance of my priorities.

³⁰ People may say that prayers which are read feel inauthentic, but it was my experience in the study that some of the liturgical prayers introduced on Sundays (which were read) were well-received.

Eight of the nine members were present.

Project Component-26: Week 5 Wednesday Prayer Meeting

At 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 21 the fifth prayer meeting of the study commenced. The facilitator was back for this portion of the evening's meetings. The service began with the customary time of quiet reflection and the lighting of prayer candles. Following this, the meeting moved into worship time featuring a video of a contemporary worship chorus. The discussion of the evening centered on two passages of scripture: Psalm 8 and James 4. A key discussion emerging during this meeting involved the topic of "humility." Two, one minute prayer times were observed during the instruction time. The meeting closed with the sharing of "Joys and Concerns" and an open invitation for those present to pray aloud. Time was limited for these prayers.

Attendance was 14 people.

Project Component-27: Week 6 Devotion Materials

The handouts beginning Monday, September 26 can be found in Appendix L. The topics of reading and reflection that week were: "Thomistic Prayer;" "Intercessory Prayer;" and "the Prayer of Relinquishment."

Project Component-28: Week 6 Sunday Worship Service Message and Prayers

The sermon for September 25 was titled, "A Deep Sense of Longing" and the primary text was Heb. 11:8-16. The sermon challenged the congregation to consider Abraham and how his life's journey was an example of faith and longing for the things of

God. Within the message there was a distinct call to reorient life and progress (in the model of Abraham) as disciples. The topic of “simple prayer” and a reference to the concluding week of the prayer study were included in the sermon.

The following prayers were part of the worship service:

- One of the CBC Prayer Group members read a Prayer of Invocation.
- A leader gave an extemporaneous prayer before the offering, which was customary at that point in the service.
- A member of the CBC Prayer Group led the congregation in a responsive reading from the hymnal. Responsive readings are typically only used on Communion Sundays and the presence of this reading in the liturgy was directly resulting from the influence of the prayer study.
- The pastor offered an extemporaneous prayer at the conclusion of the service.

The attendance and offering for Sunday, September 25 were: 90 people and \$1,271.

Project Component-29: Week 6 Small Group Meeting

The sixth meeting of the CBC Prayer Group commenced at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 28. The initial discussion centered on Thomistic Prayer and its very intellectual/analytical approach to prayer. It was discussed that this model of prayer might be perceived as excessively cerebral and lacking in emotion. With Thomistic Prayer in mind, the next topic involved the discipline of Bible study and how effort expended at this discipline might positively impact one’s relationship with God.

Additional topics for consideration in the meeting were related to “taking up the cross” as referenced in Mark 8. Intercessory prayer was a topic and during that discussion Eph. 6:18-20 was introduced. One group member had good things to say about a Christian’s need for boldness and the need to resist succumbing to fear. Interestingly, the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane made an appearance once again. The recurrence of this theme indicates, in my mind, how paradigmatic this prayer of surrender and relinquishment is for most disciples.

All nine members were present.

Project Component-30: Week 6 Wednesday Prayer Meeting

At 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 28 the sixth prayer meeting of the study commenced. The service began with the customary time of quiet reflection and the lighting of prayer candles. Following this, a Prayer of Invocation was read by the leader. Next the pastor and his wife led the congregation in live worship (guitar and voices) through four contemporary worship choruses. At the close of the worship time, the leader read a Prayer of Confession. The prayer time consumed the remainder of the meeting.

In the previous five Prayer Meetings, open appeals for the people to pray resulted in (at best) a few outspoken individuals offering prayers. The vast majority of the congregation sat silently. With determination that we would find a way to get each individual to contribute, we divided the room of seventeen people into two sides – the men in the pews on one side and the women in the pews on the other. One of the women

from the CBC Prayer Group was instructed to lead for the women and a leader was drafted from the Prayer Group for the men. The prayer time which followed had these instructions:

1. “Share prayer concerns throughout your group and at the conclusion the leader of that group will pray.”
2. “Share ‘joys’ within your group and at the conclusion the leader of that group will pray.”
3. “The last prayer will be intercessory prayer on the topics of our church, our ministries, and mission work around the world. Each person in the group (if at all possible) needs to contribute a prayer as he or she is led.”

Once the instructions were received, the sharing and praying began. As the leader (standing apart and observing), my conclusion was that finally individuals were engaged and contributed. Overhearing some of the prayers from the intercessory time I realized the congregation had powerful things to say when they would take up the challenge to give voice to their petitions. This last meeting was a gratifying conclusion to the study.

Again, attendance was 17 people.

Project Component-31: Capstone Meeting

All the components which have been discussed thus far have been important in that they each in some way contribute data to the project. In these last two components: the *Capstone Meeting* and the *Post-experiment Survey of Prayer and Devotional*

Practice, the value of the data increases significantly. What follows in this section is a review and analysis of the *Capstone Meeting*.

In the original design of the ministry project, the culminating event of the small group was going to be a 24-hour retreat. For many reasons, it was decided before the start of the experiment that the small group would not be tasked with a retreat, but would instead have a meeting of around two hours for debriefing, reviewing, and reflecting. This meeting time was selected for Sunday, October 2 at 4 p.m. at Calvary Baptist Church. The meeting was to follow a very simple agenda soliciting feedback from the participants of Group 1 (See Appendix M for the agenda).

Regarding the items on the agenda for the meeting, the first business was to revisit the Myers-Briggs inventory. For a couple of reasons (one being the distractions and delays at the beginning of the meeting I will discuss below), the personality testing and casual discussion did not end until 55 minutes had expired. This was 35 minutes short of where I wanted to conclude and nothing of significance had been accomplished. Realizing that the “personality component” of this project was not helping (and had not helped), I let it go.

As we moved on in the agenda, some good discussion occurred regarding the member’s appreciation for the new forms of prayer they had examined during the study, e.g., *Lectio Divina*. Some significant discussion centered on the value of “silence” in prayer. One member confessed that she had not attended to the prayer project as she should have because she always had a problem with “being still” – she was involved in too much activity to focus. Some described how prayer had taken on new significance

due to six weeks of intense study. Some discussion centered on how prayer prior to the study seemed to be mechanical and how sometimes prayer was engaged “just to pray.” I gathered that this meant that previously there had been a lack of thoughtfulness behind the activity. Additionally, fasting became a centerpiece of the discussion once again.

The next part of the agenda was an invitation to consider the personal impact of the prayer study. Some of the discussion reflected a hopefulness to not return to the seemingly “prayerlessness” of life before the study. Some discussion was affirming of the small group experience as an essential component for accountability. One thread in the conversation regarded the need for “high quality prayers” (I assume prayers now informed by six weeks of study) and the need for intentionality.

It was at this point that I asked the group for the first time how they did with the intentionality involved in praying the Monday-Friday topics provided on the prayer guide. The feedback from one individual (in particular) was that the prayer topics were not the most engaging part of the study and that at times those topics were prayed, but with “modifications.” When I sought clarity for his meaning, he described that if he was tasked by the prayer guide to pray for something like “the poor” (and other topics were more engaging), he moved on to something else. I was disappointed to learn this because learning to diversify the topics in prayer was a practice I had hoped to instill in the group members. Because I had not previously asked (or communicated this value) my hopes were unfulfilled. In any future prayer studies I will express the importance of praying through the topics of the day. I will also assist them with this task by demonstrating that

utilizing some creative thinking can help topics like “the poor” become more meaningful and more easily engaged.

An additional disappointment was discovered in this section of the meeting. No one present demonstrated they had kept a journal. Notes written on the devotional pages were the extent of participation in this component of the study. Responsibility for this poor performance in this area is certainly due to a lack of emphasis from the facilitator.

The final part of the *Capstone Meeting* before the closing prayer time and the eating of a meal together was a discussion of what this prayer study means to the future of the church. Some advocated beginning another small group and doing the study again. Some of the discussion regarded the church developing a “prayer partner” network. Some talk was given to making the six-week study materials available to the congregation for self-study. However, with the idea of self-study in view, one member expressed her feelings that the small group component was an essential part of the study.

There are additional issues for reflection stemming from the *Capstone Meeting*. The first issue takes us back to the beginning of the meeting. At 4 p.m. three of nine people were in the meeting room. The numbers did not pick up much from there in the first quarter of an hour. I was notified that some members were caught in the parking lot helping to unload a delivery trailer. The result was that two of the CBC Prayer Group members were considerably late (30 minutes) for what was intended to be a 90 minute meeting for discussion with an additional 30 minutes for a meal.

The second issue beyond tardiness was “absenteeism.” For the *Capstone Meeting*, six of nine members were present. Two of those members (out of seven total

meeting opportunities) had been at only three meetings, which is an attendance rating of 43%. I will move to the third and final issue before some analysis.

The third issue of the *Capstone Meeting* was the extreme difficulty of covering topics with any efficiency. Here the facilitator probably bears the burden of failure in not being more directive in guarding the group's time and ensuring that each person was given opportunity to share. Many times in this meeting the discussion veered off topic.

The issues above are in no way meant to ridicule anyone involved in the study. I am so appreciative of what they gave in time and effort to be a part of this project. But I must work with data if this is to be an honest analysis – and it seems to me that the problem with attendance on some participant's parts and the problem of meetings constantly straying from the topic is important data.

The fact that a small group of friends gathered and often times discussed things which strayed from the topic is not profound or significant. The reason why it makes it into this discussion is because there was considerable content to be covered and digressions placed the agenda in jeopardy. This situation poses an obvious question for reflection: "Was there too much content for the time allotted?"

I am aware of my own propensity to be overly-ambitious. However, I conclude that the agenda for the *Capstone Meeting* was reasonable – especially if there had not been unusual challenges delaying the meeting. I also believe that the material could have been covered if my guidance and time management had been keener. As far as lengthening the meeting, I would not do so because the issue is located around self-

discipline. If we cannot be disciplined in our task in two hours, there is the danger that three hours (and so forth) will not suffice.

I believe the above-mentioned topics of tardiness and absenteeism are merely symptoms in a chronic condition: church members give evidence of being overextended and busy to an unmanageable degree. Because of many competing loyalties and overburdened schedules, it is very hard to take on additional work such as this study required. It is entirely understandable that some will launch with the best of intentions, only to be overwhelmed by life and falter. I have made an error up until this point of “seeing the glass as half empty.” It is a miracle that so many incorporated this study into six weeks of their lives.

Now, in the place of frustration at the disappointments, is concern. I still believe that growing in prayer (which is growing in communication with God) is fundamental for spiritual development. It is obvious to me that growing in prayer is unlikely to happen short of consistent effort and a commitment at times to persevere. Most of us can agree that the value of growing in prayer is a good one, but the habits of self-discipline, focusing, and prioritizing are not in place. This lack of the necessary habits must be named and confronted before moving deeper in relationship with God.

If I were to undertake this study again as a leader, I would recognize that self-discipline and commitment should not be assumed, but should be seen for what they are: critical components to be strengthened along the prayer study journey. I would want to admonish participants that the dream of closeness to God is attainable. However, it is not

to be reached so much by learning techniques in prayer as it is in “showing up” for prayer time and again.

Project Components-32/33: Post-experiment Survey of Prayer and Devotional Practice/
Select Question Retest of the Post-experiment Survey

The most important components for assessing the success or failure of the prayer study were the pre and post surveys of prayer and devotional practice. This final survey (Appendix N) was distributed on Sunday, October 2 to the 27 participants which made up Groups 1, 2, and 3. This post-experiment survey was identical to the one described on pages 50 and 51 and presented in Appendix E, but with additional material. This additional material was comprised of a new section of statements directed at Groups 1 and 2, and a comments section open to all participants.

The statement section that was added in the post-experiment survey was composed of five statements soliciting responses from the following Likert items: *Strongly Disagree* (1); *Disagree* (2); *Neutral* (3); *Agree* (4); *Strongly Agree* (5). The nature of the first four statements was to determine the habits and the consistency of the 18 people who had been receiving weekly materials. The fifth statement was aimed at only the Group 2 members to inquire if they thought a small group experience would have enhanced the study. The other section added to the final survey was a comment section followed by blank lines. The survey ended (as did the first) with an “informed consent” paragraph and was, again, to be signed and dated.

The above “informed consent” paragraph was a careless mistake in my research methodology which had to be corrected before the report and analysis could be finalized.

The post-experiment survey should have been administered anonymously to insure the highest quality of responses. To correct this problem a retest of select questions was designed (Appendix O). The participants of the study were informed of the issue through a cover letter (Appendix P) and the retest was administered. The data in the section below reflects the retest results, not the original “Survey 2.”

According to the undergirding hypothesis in the project, Group 1 would show the greatest growth, particularly in regards to the following:

1. A greater comprehension and repertoire of various prayer forms demonstrated when comparing the pre and post surveys.
2. An increase in the practice of prayer from a perspective of the amount of time spent praying and a greater willingness to engage prayer in various situations, e.g., praying in public.

A great diversity of compelling studies could arise from scrutiny of the data, but analyzing these two components will keep the project in focus. However, there will be one additional category of consideration in this analysis.

The study had the primary and explicit dual-focus mentioned above. There was an additional focus that was mentioned, but less emphasized: growth in participants’ satisfaction with their prayer and devotional lives. Questions 44-50 on the surveys were targeted at this idea of “satisfaction” with one’s spiritual life.

Before beginning analysis, some information on the surveys was preferential and not easily used for evaluative purposes. The first statement on the surveys was: “I prefer to pray alone.” Though some interesting reflection on this question could be generated

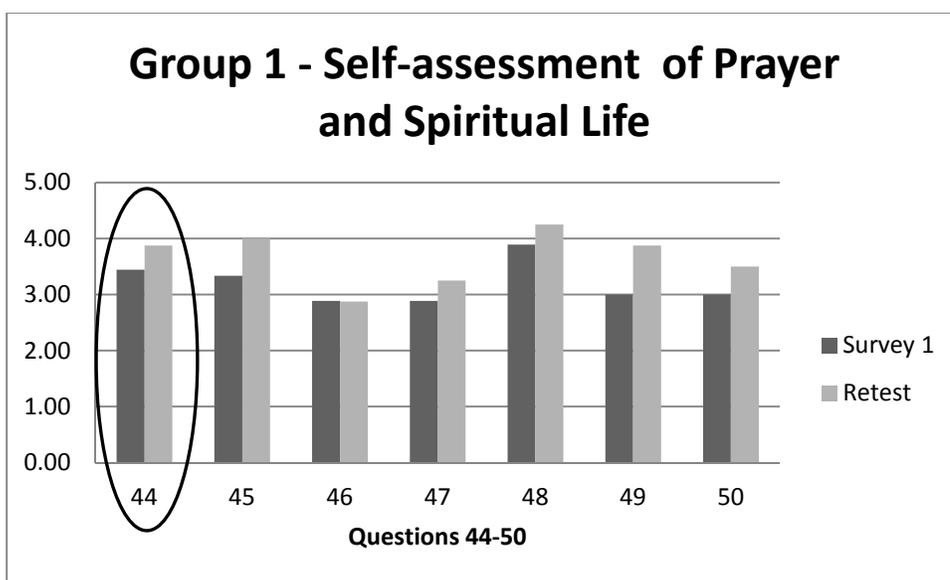
from considering the answers of 27 people over a six week time frame, this effort would have to presume a bias – praying alone is “good” or “bad” – in order to demonstrate in the final analysis group growth or decline. Thus, “praying alone” is a matter of preference, not a matter of evaluating one’s growth. Many such preferential questions existed in the surveys. Regarding any future prayer study, I would include these questions because they provide good data which could be utilized in novel ways not considered within this experiment.

I will begin in a reverse order of importance for what I believe are the key points of analysis. First we will investigate one’s satisfaction in prayer utilizing the survey information which was involved in Questions 44-50. Next we will look at participants’ growth in comprehension over the six-week study by examining the thirteen prayer terms in the “Comprehension” section. Finally, we will look at the information generated from the section of the surveys which asked for a self-assessment of the participant’s amount of time spent in daily prayer. Also utilized for considering changes in participants’ practice of prayer will come from survey questions: 5, 9, 12, 15, 22-23, and 31-38.

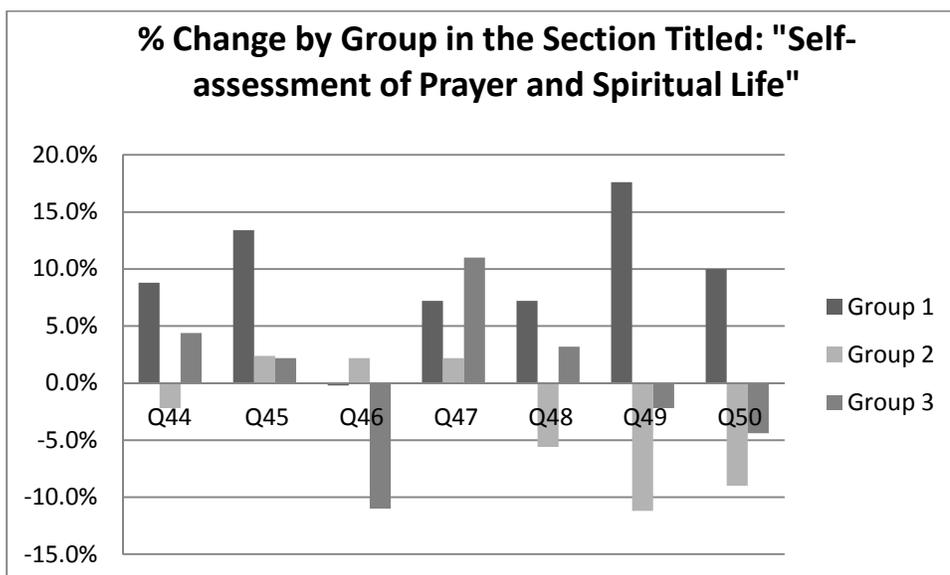
One more word is necessary before beginning final analysis of the data from the pre-experiment survey and the retest of select questions. After the retest was sent out, all 18 of the surveys (9 in each group) for Groups 2 and 3 were returned. This was not the case with Group 1. Eight of the nine surveys were returned. Though it was desirable to get 100% response, it was not achieved and the analysis must go on. Because in most of what follows the results were based on averages, the numbers still reflect the averaged response for that group on each question, and thus still are representative of performance.

Satisfaction in Prayer and Spiritual Life

Under the heading “Self-assessment of Prayer and Spiritual Life,” a list of seven statements was presented to encourage reflection regarding participants’ level of satisfaction and enjoyment of their spiritual lives. My method for analyzing group performance in this section of survey questions was to take each group member’s response for a question on the pre-experiment survey and average these nine numbers to produce a single, representative number for that group’s answer to the question. Thus, in Group 1 the nine answers on the pre-experiment survey for Question 44 were: 4, 2, 3, 2, 4, 4, 3, 5, 4 for a group averaged answer of “3.44.” This same method was applied to the retest to reach averaged answers for each of the questions. Thus, in Group 1 the eight answers on the retest for Question 44 were: 4, 4, 2, 4, 4, 5, 5, 3 for a group averaged answer of “3.88.” The entire graph for Group 1’s answers to Questions 44-50 would look like this (with the information just discussed circled):



Now, rather than show similar graphs for Groups 2 and 3, I will remove a step for this presentation and show one more bar graph. This graph will show the percentage and direction of change in the performance of the three groups per question.



The analysis of group progress over six weeks yields the following per question:

- _____ 44. I often yearn for times of prayer. (G1 = +8.8%; G2 = -2.2%; G3 = +4.4%)
- _____ 45. People often share their prayer concerns with me knowing I will pray over them. (G1 = +13.4%; G2 = +2.4%; G3 = +2.2%)
- _____ 46. I find my mind wanders in prayer. (G1 = -0.2%; G2 = +2.2%; G3 = -11.0%)
- _____ 47. I am generally happy with my prayer life. (G1 = +7.2%; G2 = +2.2%; G3 = +11.0%)
- _____ 48. I feel uplifted after pausing for times of prayer. (G1 = +7.2%; G2 = -5.6%; G3 = +3.2%)

_____ 49. I feel generally “at peace” in my life at this time.
(G1 = +17.6%; G2 = -11.2%; G3 = -2.2%)

_____ 50. I feel close to God and His will. (G1 = +10%; G2 = -9%; G3 = -4.4%)

Much reflection can be spurred by these results. However, the summary of the study’s findings with regards to “satisfaction with one’s prayer and spiritual life” indicates that Group 1 showed the most consistent growth in a positive direction. In fact, this group would have uniformly indicated positive growth in this category if not for the statement (that perhaps did not belong in this section) – “I find my mind wanders in prayer.” Additionally, this group had the strongest positive response for any question (Question 49 – “I feel generally ‘at peace’ in my life at this time”) with a 17.6% improvement. Group 2 had four negative results out of seven questions and Group 3 had three negative results of self-assessment over a six-week period.

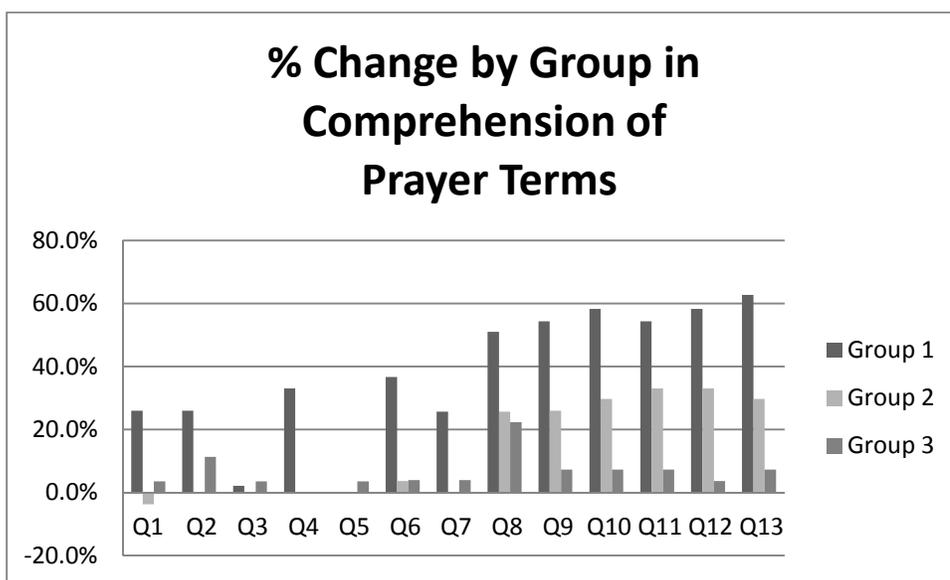
Though there are many different ways to continue to assess these results, for the sake of the experiment’s stated purposes it would seem that Group 1 achieved a higher degree of satisfaction in prayer and spirituality through the course of the study. This improvement is assumed to be attributable to Group 1’s intentional self-study and their experience of synthesis in a small group.

Comprehension of Prayer Terms

Several “types” of prayer and prayer terms were presented to the 27 participants at the outset of the experiment. Groups 1 and 2 encountered each of these terms (and were sometimes invited to practice these prayers) in the course of the daily devotions.

Some of the types of prayer were demonstrated within the Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting or in Sunday worship. At the conclusion of the experiment all three groups had the opportunity to reevaluate their knowledge of those terms.

The following is a graph (like the one immediately preceding) which indicates the percentage and direction of change in the performance of the three groups per question from the pre to the post surveys.



The analysis of group progress over six weeks yields the following per prayer term:

- _____ 1. Intercessory prayer (**G1 = +26%**; **G2 = -3.7%**; **G3 = +3.6%**)
- _____ 2. Prayers of petition / supplication
(**G1 = +26%**; **G2 = “No Change;”** **G3 = +11.3%**)
- _____ 3. Prayers of confession (**G1 = +2.2%**; **G2 = “No Change;”** **G3 = +3.6%**)
- _____ 4. Contemplative prayer (**G1 = +33%**; **G2 = “No Change;”** **G3 = “No Change”**)

- _____ 5. Prayers of thanksgiving / adoration
(G1 = “No Change;” G2 = “No Change;” G3 = +3.6%)
- _____ 6. Prayer of invocation (G1 = +36.7%; G2 = +3.7%; G3 = +4%)
- _____ 7. Pastoral prayer (G1 = +25.7%; G2 = “No Change;” G3 = +4%)
- _____ 8. Prayer of Examen (G1 = +51; G2 = +25.7%; G3 = +22.3%)
- _____ 9. *Lectio Divina* (G1 = +54.3%; G2 = +26%; G3 = +7.3%)
- _____ 10. Thomistic prayer (G1 = +58.3%; G2 = +29.7%; G3 = +7.3%)
- _____ 11. Augustinian prayer (G1 = +54.3; G2 = +33%; G3 = +7.3%)
- _____ 12. Franciscan prayer (G1 = +58.3%; G2 = +33%; G3 = +3.7%)
- _____ 13. Ignatian prayer (G1 = +62.7%; G2 = +29.7%; G3 = +7.3%)

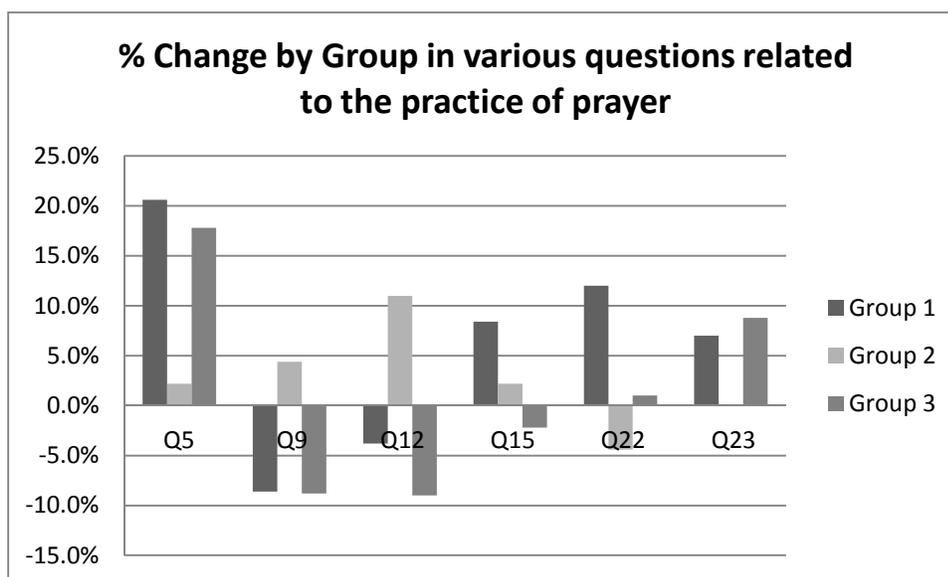
Reflecting on the above results it is obvious that Group 1 showed the most consistent growth in a positive direction. Group 2 had the second best performance overall followed by Group 3 in last place. Again the highest percentage of improvement was located within Group 1 at 62.7%. For the sake of the experiment’s stated purposes it is observable that Group 1 achieved a higher degree of comprehension (understanding) when viewing terms associated with types of prayer. This improvement, again, is assumed to be attributable to Group 1’s intentional self-study and their experience of synthesis in a small group.

A word about the “Comprehension of Prayer Terms” section remains. This part of the experiment could be improved by asking participants to assess how knowledge of these types of prayer impacted the quality of their prayer times. As is, this experiment

did not attempt to correlate one's understanding of prayer types and the quality of one's experience in prayer.

The Practice of Prayer

Of primary importance in this ministry experiment was the goal of influencing participants to increase their time spent in prayer. Additionally, it was desirable to aid participants in increasing their activities in prayer so that there might be willingness to engage prayer with others (where previously there was none) or an improvement in prayer (such as learning to listen instead of only talking, or praying for the needs of others instead of only praying for private concerns). In the words of the project goal this experiment sought to “improve the understanding and *practice* of prayer.” The following analysis looks to see if the “practice” of prayer improved (and to what degree) in a comparison of the performances of Groups 1, 2, and 3. Three graphs and accompanying analysis will follow beginning with a compilation analysis of Questions 5, 9, 12, 15, 22-23, followed by analysis of Questions 31-38, and concluding this section with the analysis of participants' self-assessment of time spent in prayer at the outset of the study and at the conclusion.



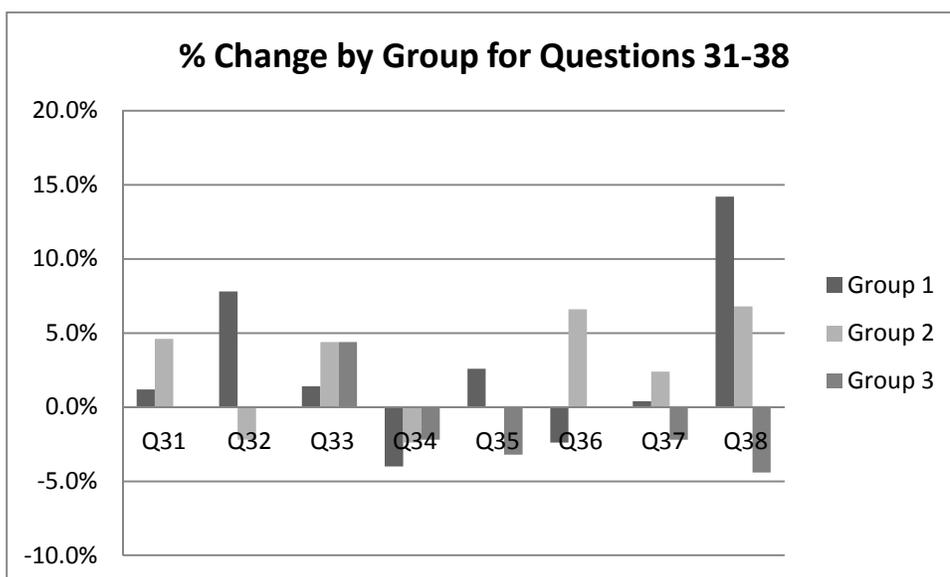
The analysis of group progress over six weeks yields the following per question:

- _____ 5. In private prayer I spend time in silence and listening.
(G1 = +20.6%; G2 = +2.2%; G3 = +17.8%)
- _____ 9. I willingly pray in public. (G1 = -8.6%; G2 = +4.4%; G3 = -8.8%)
- _____ 12. I initiate prayer with individuals or groups.
(G1 = -3.8%; G2 = +11%; G3 = -9%)
- _____ 15. I pray daily. (G1 = +8.4%; G2 = +2.2%; G3 = -2.2%)
- _____ 22. I spend time listening to God in prayer.
(G1 = +12%; G2 = -4.4%; G3 = +1%)
- _____ 23. I write down people's names and prayer concerns.
(G1 = +7%; G2 = "No Change;" G3 = +8.8%)

The summary of the findings of the above six questions relating to improving practice in prayer indicates that Group 1 showed growth in four of the six areas. The results from two questions displayed downward movement. Significant positive changes

occurred in the categories addressed by Questions 5, 22, and 23. Regarding Group 2, four categories displayed upward movement, one displayed downward movement, and one was “No Change.” Group 3 demonstrated an even split of three positive swings and three negatives. Though Group 2 posts some good numbers in this category, Group 1 is still outperforming when taking into consideration they garnered the greatest number of results in a positive direction, fewest negatives, and highest numbers regarding positive change.

The following is the analysis of Questions 31-38. This section of the survey was titled “For What Do I Pray?” and some words about the idea behind this section are appropriate. This experimenter was aware from the outset of the study – and even more so now – that if the person praying does not show some effort at extending him or herself in praying for a variety of needs, prayer life easily devolves into a self-centered and monotonous exercise covering few topics. If the post-experiment survey for this section were to show growth – particularly in the statements dealing with prayer that is other-focused and diverse (Questions 32 & 34-38) – then a case can be made for qualitative growth in the participants’ prayer life. The following is the statistical analysis which will be followed by a brief commentary of the results.



_____ 31. I pray for forgiveness. (**G1 = +1.2%**; **G2 = +4.6%**; **G3 = “No Change”**)

_____ 32. I pray for the needs of others.
(**G1 = +7.8%**; **G2 = -2.2%**; **G3 = “No Change”**)

_____ 33. I will ask for my personal desires in prayer.
(**G1 = +1.4%**; **G2 = +4.4%**; **G3 = 4.4%**)

_____ 34. I pray for my community. (**G1 = -4%**; **G2 = -2.4%**; **G3 = -2.2%**)

_____ 35. I pray for my church.
(**G1 = +2.6%**; **G2 = “No Change”**; **G3 = -3.2%**)

_____ 36. I pray for my government and leaders.
(**G1 = -2.4%**; **G2 = +6.6%**; **G3 = “No Change”**)

_____ 37. I pray for needs around the world. (**G1 = +4%**; **G2 = +2.4%**; **G3 = -2.2%**)

_____ 38. I pray for Christian missions. (**G1 = +14.2%**; **G2 = +6.8%**; **G3 = -4.4%**)

Glancing at the graph, it might be hard to readily see which group performed the best. However, the numbers (though at times showing low percentages) are clearly in

favor of Group 1 with six positive returns. Group 2 showed positive movement for five of the statements and Group 3 was noteworthy in its ambivalence and negativity. By the final survey after six weeks had elapsed, Group 3 respondents gave answers to four of these questions showing a decline, three showing “No Change,” and only one which was a positive self-assessment.

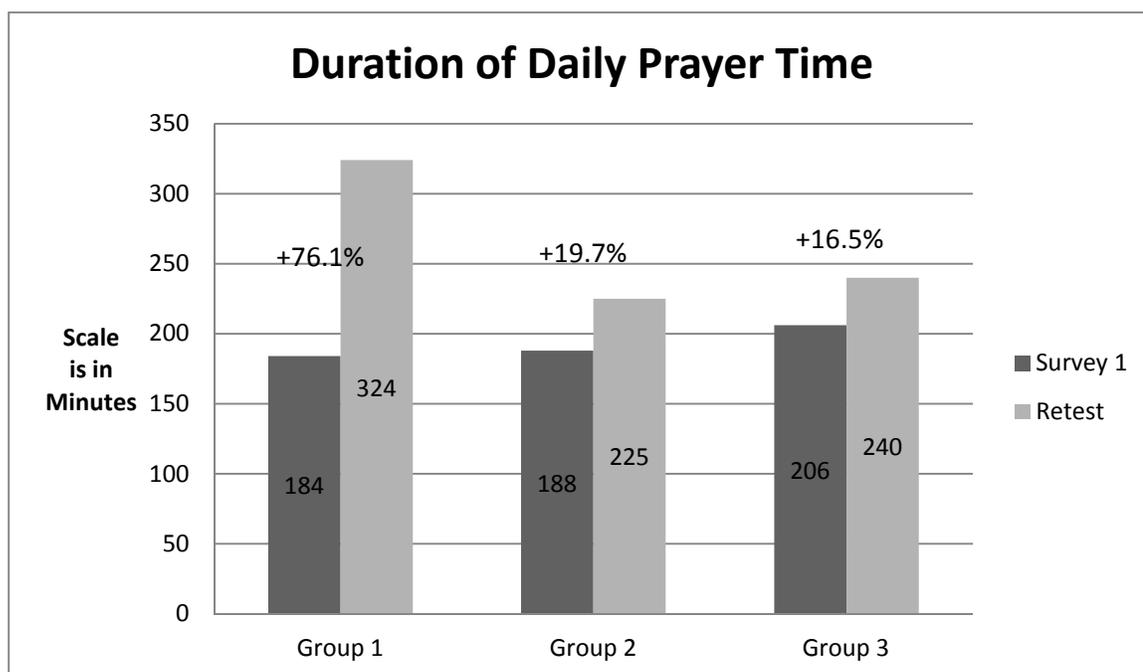
Before leaving this section to begin the analysis of the final category – time spent in daily prayer – I feel it necessary to say that I am hesitant about awarding Group 1 an unqualified win. On one hand I want to stay consistent in methodology by giving the most credence to positive movement. On the other hand, in some select line-by-line analysis we would see that Group 2 performed with significant flourish in comparison to Group 1. In some select analysis we would also see that the difference in performance between these two was statistically insignificant. Also, no consideration was given for where the respondents started on the first survey. With this in mind, we cannot really know with the above data if by the end of the six-week study that Group 1’s +2.6% jump in “I pray for my church” can be understood to mean that Group 1 is now offering more prayer in that category than Group 2. Group 2 might have started at a higher baseline and then exhibited “No Change.”

To develop higher quality data in the future, it would be necessary to establish the baseline from the outset of the experiment. The pre-experiment survey could be altered from a Likert scale to a direct question such as, “Estimate how many times per week you pray for forgiveness, the church, Christian missions, etc.” Questioned in this manner, a baseline would be established.

The final category of analysis is “Duration of Daily Prayer Time”. At the start of the experiment, twenty-seven participants estimated the amount of time they spent in daily prayer. Their choices were: <5min; 5-15min; 15-30min; 30-60min; and >60min. For ease of analysis, the data from those surveys was rendered more precise by redefining the above categories in whole numbers instead of ranges. Thus the following values were created: 4min; 8min; 23min; 45min; and 61min.

The post-experiment “Retest” was administered with the same question regarding prayer time and twenty-six of the twenty-seven responses are available for comparative purposes. In this category we are not dealing with averages and the absence of a group member in the compilation of prayer minutes is significant. To solve the problem in an equitable manner I have calculated what the average number of prayer minutes is for Group 1 (36 minutes) on the retest and have used that number in place of the missing ninth member of Group 1.

Plugging these numbers into the responses of the three groups yields the following graph:



Group 1 went from a group who prior to the experiment reported approximately 184 minutes of prayer daily to a group whose participants reported approximately 324 minutes of daily prayer after the experiment – a momentous increase of 76.1%. The other groups started from a higher baseline of minutes of daily prayer, but only had modest increases (19.7% and 16.5%) when compared to Group 1.

In view throughout the study was this idea that increasing the sheer amount of time in daily prayer was of paramount importance. Group 1 was projected to be the group which experienced the greatest growth overall due to their self-study resources and small group meetings. It was expected that it would be seen that their time in prayer would be significantly higher than the other groups. This expectation was met.

Summary of Conclusions Regarding Quantitative Research

As was just mentioned above this prayer study had expectations that intentionality in developing one's prayer life – particularly by utilizing resources for directed study and by analyzing and synthesizing in a small group context – would yield appreciable results in the quality and quantity of prayer time. This theory was tested by employing quantitative methodology through self-assessment surveys which probed:

1. Satisfaction in prayer and devotional life
2. Comprehension of prayer terms
3. The quality of prayer (mainly the issue of diversity within the practice of prayer) and the quantity of prayer.

These components were specific subsets under the projects general stated purpose to attend to the growth of disciples through improving the understanding and practice of prayer.

Having reflected on each component in each section, it now suffices to say that Group 1 emerges from the quantitative section of the research demonstrating the highest degree of achievement with regards to the project's stated goal.

Summary of Conclusions Regarding Qualitative Research

Endeavoring to follow the format of this chapter consistently (discussing each component in a chronological fashion) I reserved the summary of the qualitative research findings to a point outside of the discussion of *Project Components-01-33*. The matters of importance in this summary section are different than the ones in the quantitative

summary above. Whereas the above section was concerned with conclusions about demonstrable achievement, the summary of the qualitative research is much more centered on insights gained through the implementation of the experiment.

The six-week prayer study began on Sunday, August 21. Eighteen people agreed to engage devotional readings and focus on prayer on an individual basis. Additionally, nine of these eighteen agreed to participate in a weekly small group. The Wednesday evening meeting throughout this time was altered to emphasize prayer. By virtue of this type of intensive focus, any participant (who attempted to keep pace with the unfolding study) would have encountered new ideas, new practices, and subsequent growth. The experimenter would likely have different insights. I now list these insights in quick summary fashion.

1. Each instrument involved in the experiment can be utilized for engaging the participants in an active way and soliciting helpful feedback. (Recall the discussion of *Project Component-01: Newsletter Article*).
2. If there are core value which need to be maintained for the integrity of the experiment, e.g., attendance, do not simply put these values in writing initially, and not encourage them consistently along the way.
3. Avoid distractions. (Recall Myers-Briggs). There are many exciting things to occupy the time of participants, but the field must be focused and limited.
4. Maintain healthy boundaries as a leader. (Recall the discussion centered on the conflict of week 3 detailed in *Project Component-17*).

5. Expecting dramatic, positive results in the short term is unrealistic. (Recall the discussion of spiritual warfare in *Project Component-17: Week 3 Small Group Meeting*).
6. Creative ways to engage group participation can be discovered. (Recall the discussion from the last prayer meeting in *Project Component-30*.)
7. Covering a large amount of content may be inherent to the design, but time constraints and human nature are going to pose challenges to the delivery of large amounts of information. Improve time management when you can; change expectations when you cannot. (Recall the discussion about lengthening the time for the *Capstone Meeting* in *Project Component-31*).
8. Growing in prayer involves disciplined practice more than the learning of techniques. (Recall the conclusion of *Project Component-31*).
9. Do not think the mission is done when the report is turned in. Some participants in an intensive journey such as the prayer study will want to know how they can continue the journey. They are asking for the leader to help them not to lose the gains of the last six weeks. (Recall discussions from the *Capstone Meeting*. Additionally, I will address the future of the prayer study at Calvary Baptist Church in the next chapter.)

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This report and analysis has described the Doctor of Ministry project “Teaching Disciples to Pray: Improving the Understanding and Practice of Prayer at Calvary Baptist Church of Floyd, Virginia.” The previous four chapters have stated the “ministry question” (Chapter 1), detailed a personal and theological rationale for engaging this project (Chapters 2 & 3), and have outlined the ministry project’s implementation phase, its numerous constituent parts, and offered critical evaluation (Chapter 4). The final pages of this report address the results of the project, missteps taken, personal reflections and insights, plans for the future (both personal and involving Calvary Baptist Church), and a conclusion.

Results

Calvary Baptist Church has experienced significant growth and successes since its founding in 1983. Through the years this church has embraced innovative approaches designed to foster spiritual growth and growth in congregational numbers. Short term gains in this respect have been good. However, picking up a new discipleship program, changing the style of worship, or encouraging the employment of a novel evangelistic

method has been insufficient to sustain appreciable, quantitative growth. After a season of trying a ministry technique, the increases reached a plateau and often following this phase was a decline.

I – like most pastors I know – have deeply desired to see the people and the church grow. Having participated in this process of increase, plateau, and decline numerous times, I began some critical reflection in hopes that there was an alternative to this up and down cycle. My thoughts (greatly aided by my reading of Luke 11) eventually arrived at a conclusion that can be envisioned in terms of a structure – a building.

Many of the past programs I had experienced in ministry had disregarded the foundation. They were much more about working on various floors which reached skyward, or about finish work in the interior, or work on the façade. For some it is easy to be consumed with these parts of a building because these are the parts we see time and again. But below the building is an essential foundation.

This ministry project recognized that Calvary Baptist Church (and the experimenter) needed to address the foundation of spiritual growth. In Luke 11 the disciples ask Jesus for an account of His practice of prayer. What He reveals in His words is a life and ministry built on the foundation of prayer and communion with God the Father. A disciple's needs are met (and I believe a church's deepest need is met) when prayer and relationship with God becomes of paramount importance. Prayer was the foundation in Jesus' life, it was offered as a foundation for the first disciples, and it is offered to all subsequent disciples.

Here in the “Results” section all of what I have said thus far is a prelude leading to this statement: “There are not many observable results at Calvary from the prayer study at this time.” Returning to my goals, I have to admit that I wanted to see dramatic results of individual and corporate prosperity through the prayer study and afterwards. However, in the course of this report and analysis I have occasionally admitted that such short term expectations were naïve. The real measure of the impact of this study will have to be assessed sometime in the future. For now, I feel that I can point to three things which indicate that changes have ensued since engaging in a season of prayer with members of Calvary Baptist Church.

It is hard (or impossible) to quantify, but there is a greater conversation regarding prayer in the church today. In Sunday school classes, Church Council meetings, Deacons’ meetings, and one-on-one encounters, there seems to be more talk about the need to tarry in prayer. Some individuals (who experienced a growth in prayer focus during the study) have since had challenges in maintaining the regimen of prayer. In some of these cases, the individual concludes that becoming refocused in prayer (not focusing on the next project that comes down the line) is the key to resetting the spiritual life. It would seem that prayer as a fundamental issue of discipleship enters the discussion much more frequently than it did six months ago.

A more tangible result lies in the alteration which occurred in the Wednesday night Bible study. Since the conclusion of the study in the fall, one Wednesday each month has been set aside for prayer. Admittedly this is a modest change, but it is a change nonetheless. Three Wednesdays each month follow a traditional format. A

fourth Wednesday is now devoted to worship, sharing of “Joys and Concerns,” guided prayers, and corporate prayer participation.

The third and final result I can speak of at this moment in the life of this congregation is the alteration which the prayer study has spurred in our monthly food distribution ministry. This food program has always offered a worship service on the night of the distribution. Since the ministry experiment, the conclusion of each service has been an invitation to receive one-on-one prayer from the pastor and other volunteers from church leadership. This invitation to prayer is being readily accepted by the people in the pews. Some evenings, the leaders are involved in prayer for 15-20 minutes after the conclusion of the service. The leadership being willing and available to pray at these food ministry meetings is a direct result of the increased focus on prayer engendered by the study.

Missteps

During and after the project implementation many things came to mind which could have been done better or more efficiently. This is not at all surprising given that the proposal submitted beforehand could not reasonably have foreseen the various instances which were going to require “tweaking” and troubleshooting. However, there are two subjects within the experiment that were “missteps,” and given the opportunity to go back again, they would need to change.

The first issue was a failure on my part to maintain the standard in research methodology of administering surveys anonymously. I had heard the warnings

repeatedly from the faculty to be wary of transgressions in this area. However, I was not clear on their exact meaning believing that they were speaking on anonymity in the reporting phase of the project. My pre and post-experiment surveys included an “informed consent” paragraph to be signed and dated. When the violation was discovered I was thrust into the unhappy and inconvenient position of having to retest twenty-seven participants, and test them within a very narrow window of time in order to make the deadline. Clearly, if I could go back I would code the surveys appropriately to maintain anonymity while still being able to track the progress of group participants.

Second, my post-experiment reflection causes me to wonder, “Did I run a ‘prayerless’ prayer study?” Naturally we prayed for six weeks in our various meetings. However, there was so much teaching involved and time was often so limited, that it was extremely rare to indulge in the very act of prayer. I believe that my own affinity for study and gathering knowledge shifted the prayer meetings from the *experience* of prayer to a focus on the *theory* of prayer. (I will say more about this in the section below). Going back, I would guard the prayer times on the agenda realizing that the best way to grow in prayer for most people is not through an intellectual approach, but through application and practice.

Personal Insight

There were many insights gleaned from this ministry project. A list of these can be found at the conclusion of Chapter 4. In this section I would like to address one

important (and personal) insight derived from the experiment and from my participation in the Doctor of Ministry program as a whole.

I alluded to the first insight in the section above. I have had much opportunity to reflect on my personal learning style over the years and have recognized that my preferences are along strong cognitive and intellectual lines. I enjoy a classroom presentation with lots of information. Because I am typically independent and a self-starter, I take the information from the classroom (or my reading and study) and use it to solve real-world problems. This style, which gathers information and begins to work on later applications, is not the only (and maybe not even the dominant style) within a learning group.

My beloved lectures and written materials are efficient in the communication of information. However, they fall short in that not all styles can make ready use of this low-participation, unidirectional model. I am now considering how some learning styles need a clearer connection drawn between information and application. Additionally, utilizing a variety of techniques in teaching will maximize the potential of engaging people who have a variety of learning styles.

Besides a generalized insight, this reflection applies to the ministry project. Now I see that I designed a prayer study that was reflective of my own preferences and style of learning. If I had recognized this earlier, I could have altered my approach at times and I could have certainly lessened some of my frustrations.

Future Plans

In the *Capstone Meeting*, the future of the *CBC Prayer Group* was discussed. I believe that two of the ideas talked about must be attended to in the future. The first was the idea that the prayer study should be published (at least) for the congregation as a workbook for self-study. The study involved a great deal of research and writing and is now potentially a valuable resource for anyone who has the desire for growth in prayer via self-study. The second idea is that there is a need felt by some that the church should continue to offer small group studies using the curriculum in prayer. Group study offers accountability and fellowship dimensions not present within the self-study format.

Both of these are more than ideas, they are intentions. In the February 2012 Church Council meeting one of the topics of discussion will be centered on continuing to reap the benefits of our experience in the prayer study. Specifically, I will discuss with the group having the materials bound and made available to the congregation. Also, I will discuss beginning a new section of the small group study led, ideally, by one of the previous members of the small group experience.

On a personal note, some of my hopes and plans for this prayer curriculum have already begun to manifest. In January of 2012 I was flown to Missouri to preach at a friend's church with the purpose of launching the six-week study for his congregation. I found that I was very passionate about my prayer subject and that I wanted to share whatever wisdom I had with this congregation. I envision in the future that this passion will translate into published materials and guest-speaking spots.

Conclusion

The project can be deemed a success when considering the overarching goal – to improve the *understanding* and *practice* of prayer – and the small group's demonstrated performance. However, these results are to be expected during a season of focus on virtually any topic. The real measure of success will have to be viewed over the long term.

Prayer must become an internalized value which then becomes demonstrated in consistent practice. This experiment (for me at least) peeled away the mystery of growth as a disciple. I still believe that a God with mysterious and awesome abilities will sometimes need to effect supernatural change within our lives. But added to this fundamental belief is a growing belief in the part that *we* play in discipleship. Jesus made the time for prayer and through that action He became a co-laborer with God. We, too, must follow this example by placing ourselves in vital connection with God through the consistent practice of prayer.

APPENDIX A

August 2011 Newsletter Article

“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”

The prayer life of Jesus fascinates me. Numerous times in the gospels Jesus is depicted as retreating from his busy ministry in order to pray. On one occasion the disciples must have been unable to contain their own fascination and questions regarding Jesus’ prayer life, so they put it to Jesus directly:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“‘Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:1-4, NIV)

This basic outline for prayer speaks of intimacy with God, of our need to acknowledge His glory, the need to keep God’s coming kingdom in our minds at all times, our need for basic provision and sustenance, our need for forgiveness to flow into us and through us, and our need for guidance through the temptations which assail us.

That is the summary of the teaching, but we *need* to spend more time than this in trying to understand and practice effective prayer. Beginning mid to late August (exact dates are not finalized) we are going to carefully consider prayer in our Wednesday evening meetings and during Sunday morning worship. Additionally, there will be a small group meeting with me for six weeks to delve deep into the subject of prayer. All told, we will be making every effort to grow in prayer following the example of the early disciples and Jesus himself. “Lord, teach us to pray!”

Pastor Randy

APPENDIX B

Cover Letters

Welcome to the *CBC Prayer Group*:

An individual & small group exploration of the world of prayer

I am so glad that you have agreed to undertake this journey. I can think of few things more beneficial and gratifying for disciples of Christ to study than “prayer.” For the next six weeks we will be delving deeply into a study and practice of prayer. You should know that the church will be addressing prayer in various ways throughout this season, but your group stands out. In your particular group of nine you will be focused on prayer as well as the others, but will be bonding and developing a small group community. Through weekly meetings, *Facebook*, and participation in services, we will journey together on what promises to be a highly impacting adventure! And here is where it all begins...

Mapping It Out

The timeframe for this study is Sunday, August 21 – Sunday, October 2. During this time please make every effort to be at Wednesday small group meetings from 6:00-6:45. The dates and subjects:

- ❖ August 24.....The Lord’s Prayer: relating to the Father;
simple prayer
- ❖ August 31.....Prayers of thanksgiving and adoration; *lectio
divina*
- ❖ September 7.....Prayers of petition and supplication; Ignatian
prayer
- ❖ September 14.....Prayers of confession; Augustinian prayer
- ❖ September 21.....Prayer of examen; Franciscan prayer
- ❖ September 28.....Intercessory prayer; Thomistic prayer

Additionally, the 7:00 *Revive Worship Service* will be transformed into a prayer meeting for all of the dates above. I would like for you to participate in the leadership of those meetings by putting into practice the various forms of prayer about which we are learning. On Sundays during this six-week period you may also be invited to lead some

prayers in the morning worship service. Finally, there will be a “wrap-up” meeting on Sunday, October 2.

That is the schedule, but what will you be doing? For starters I am asking you to purchase a small (1” would be fine) 3-ring binder in which you can place all the materials given to you on Sundays. Those materials will be lessons, reflections, and guides to prayer for that week. I also want you to journal throughout the experience. You may do this on loose-leaf paper in your binder, or you may choose to purchase something specifically for a journal. Mostly, I am asking you to carve out time for prayer each day, to complete any handout exercises, to journal, and to participate fully in the small group. For review, you will be:

- Praying
- Completing weekly exercises which are placed in a 3-ring binder
- Journaling
- Meeting and discussing

First Steps on the Journey

A journey of a thousand miles, as the Chinese proverb states, begins with a single step. Well, let me tell you about the first *six* steps from my perspective. Each of you needs to:

- 1) Complete two temperament/personality inventories and email me the results. If you like, you may put them directly on the wall in *Facebook* and discuss with your peers.
 - Go to http://www.personalitytype.com/career_quiz_2 and take this inventory.
 - Go to www.keirseey.com and take the KTS-II sorter at the top right.
- 2) Complete the 4 page “Survey of Prayer and Devotional Practice” and return it to me.
- 3) Complete the “Small Group Participant Agreement” and return it to me.
- 4) Sign up for *Facebook* (if you haven’t already) and join: CBC Prayer Group.
- 5) Receive and look over your first week’s materials.
- 6) Meet together on Wednesday, August 24 at 6 pm.

That’s it! Let’s begin the exploration of the world of prayer!

Pastor Randy

Welcome to a “self-guided prayer experience”!

I am so glad that you have agreed to undertake this journey. I can think of few things more beneficial and gratifying for disciples of Christ to study than “prayer.” For the next six weeks we will be delving deeply into a study and practice of prayer. Throughout this season a small group will meet weekly to discuss prayer, the Wednesday evening service format will be changed to a prayer meeting, and prayer will be addressed in many ways on Sunday mornings. Your place in the study of prayer is an individual, self-guided one. You will be provided resources weekly which are meant to enhance your understanding and practice of prayer. You probably want to know much more information about what lies ahead, so I’ll sketch some things out and we will let the journey begin!

Mapping It Out

The timeframe for this study is Sunday, August 21 – Sunday, October 2. The subjects of study by week are:

Week beginning...

- ❖ August 21.....The Lord’s Prayer: relating to the Father; simple prayer
- ❖ August 28.....Prayers of thanksgiving and adoration; *lectio divina*
- ❖ September 4.....Prayers of petition and supplication; Ignatian prayer
- ❖ September 11.....Prayers of confession; Augustinian prayer
- ❖ September 18.....Prayer of examen; Franciscan prayer
- ❖ September 25.....Intercessory prayer; Thomistic prayer

What will you do during this time? For starters I am asking you to purchase a small (1” would be fine) 3-ring binder in which you can place all the materials given to you on Sundays. Those materials will be lessons, reflections, and guides to prayer for that week. I also want you to journal throughout the experience. You may do this on loose-leaf paper in your binder, or you may choose to purchase something specifically for a journal. Mostly, I am asking you to carve out time for prayer each day, to complete any handout exercises, and to journal. I will not be asking you to discuss your assignments or journals and will in no way check up on you to see if you are progressing. I am just going to give you some resources each week and turn you loose. For review, you will be:

- Praying
- Completing weekly exercises which are placed in a 3-ring binder
- Journaling

First Steps on the Journey

A journey of a thousand miles, as the Chinese proverb states, begins with a single step. Well, let me tell you about the first *two* steps from my perspective. Each of you needs to:

- 1) Complete the 4 page “Survey of Prayer and Devotional Practice” and return it to me.
- 2) Receive and look over your first week’s materials.

That’s it! Let’s begin the exploration of the world of prayer!

Pastor Randy

APPENDIX C

Small Group Participant Covenant

Participant Covenant

This document is designed to outline expectations and make lucid the journey ahead for a small group engaged in a season of prayer. This covenant is drawn up in full recognition that “real life” happens and attendance in all meetings may occasionally be impossible. But having said that it is still important to realize how valuable each person’s diligence is for the success of this experiment.

I, _____, commit to participate fully in this prayer group. I have been informed of the nature of this Doctor of Ministry project and am aware its design and its stated goal. I have been informed regarding publication of this research and give my consent as a participant to the anonymous use of any of my contributions (verbal, written, or otherwise).

I understand that there is a substantial time commitment and expectation to attend the required meetings:

- Six small group study and prayer meetings
- Six Wednesday evening prayer services
- Some Sunday morning meetings
- Attendance at the post-experiment retreat

Additionally, I understand there is expectation that I will engage the experiment fully by completing required assignments, such as:

- Answering questions in the workbook
- Journaling
- Conducting a regular personal prayer time
- Participating in all group discussions.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Myers-Briggs Results for Group 1

Participant 1	Male	ENTJ
Participant 2	Male	ISFJ
Participant 3	Female	ENFJ
Participant 4	Male	INFJ
Participant 5	Female	INFJ
Participant 6	Male	ESFP
Participant 7	Female	INFJ
Participant 8	Female	No results
Participant 9	Male	No results

APPENDIX E

Survey of Prayer and Devotional Practice (Pre-experiment)

Please give an honest assessment of your current experience with prayer. Select the best description on a scale of 1-5 and write it in the blank provided.

Not at All / Never	A Little / Sometimes	Neutral	Mostly / Most of the Time	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Private Prayer

- _____ 1. I prefer to pray alone.
- _____ 2. For my private prayers I prefer a consistent time and place.
- _____ 3. When praying in private, I speak my prayer out loud.
- _____ 4. My prayer language in private is informal.
- _____ 5. In private prayer I spend time in silence and listening.
- _____ 6. I utilize the Bible during private devotional and prayer times.
- _____ 7. I utilize other printed, digital, or audio/visual resources during private devotional and prayer times.
- _____ 8. I am refreshed by private prayer more than public prayer.

Public Prayer

- _____ 9. I willingly pray in public.
- _____ 10. I listen to people carefully when they pray in public.
- _____ 11. I pray with others in order to seek direction in important decisions
- _____ 12. I initiate prayer with individuals or groups.

_____ 13. I wish for more prayer during worship services.

_____ 14. I wish for more opportunities to pray in public.

When Do I Pray?

_____ 15. I pray daily.

_____ 16. I pray spontaneously.

_____ 17. I typically have bedtime prayers.

_____ 18. I typically pray before meals.

_____ 19. I pray either inwardly or out loud during the average Sunday worship service.

_____ 20. I pray either inwardly or out loud in prayer at the Wednesday evening service.

How Do I Pray?

_____ 21. I like to pray with a certain posture, e.g., kneeling, or in a certain place.

_____ 22. I spend time listening to God in prayer.

_____ 23. I write down people's names and prayer concerns.

_____ 24. I fast and pray.

_____ 25. I enjoy written prayers.

_____ 26. I will express my emotions fully to God in prayer, even if I am angry with Him.

_____ 27. I meditate on Scripture when praying.

_____ 28. I address my prayers to God the Father.

_____ 29. I address my prayers to Jesus.

_____ 30. I address my prayers to the Holy Spirit.

For What Do I Pray?

- _____ 31. I pray for forgiveness.
- _____ 32. I pray for the needs of others.
- _____ 33. I will ask for my personal desires in prayer.
- _____ 34. I pray for my community.
- _____ 35. I pray from my church.
- _____ 36. I pray for my government and leaders.
- _____ 37. I pray for needs around the world.
- _____ 38. I pray for Christian missions.

Beliefs About Prayer

- _____ 39. I feel that there is power in prayer.
- _____ 40. I feel that prayer is one of the most important things a church can do.
- _____ 41. I would rather be doing something active to meet a need than spend time praying.
- _____ 42. I feel that God does not hear prayers when there is sin in my life.
- _____ 43. I feel that prayers of clergy, deacons, or “saintly” people are more likely to be answered.

Self-assessment of Prayer and Spiritual Life

- _____ 44. I often yearn for times of prayer.
- _____ 45. People often share their prayer concerns with me knowing I will pray over them.
- _____ 46. I find that my mind wanders in prayer.
- _____ 47. I am generally happy with my prayer life.

- _____ 48. I feel uplifted after pausing for times of prayer.
- _____ 49. I feel generally “at peace” in my life at this time.
- _____ 50. I feel close to God and His will.

Please rate on a scale of 1-3 your comprehension of the following terms:

No Comprehension	Vague Comprehension or Unsure	Basic Comprehension or Better
1	2	3

- _____ 1. Intercessory prayer
- _____ 2. Prayers of petition / supplication
- _____ 3. Prayers of confession
- _____ 4. Contemplative prayer
- _____ 5. Prayers of thanksgiving / adoration
- _____ 6. Prayers of invocation
- _____ 7. Pastoral prayer
- _____ 8. Prayer of Examen
- _____ 9. *Lectio Divina*
- _____ 10. Thomistic prayer
- _____ 11. Augustinian prayer
- _____ 12. Franciscan prayer
- _____ 13. Ignatian prayer

Please answer the following by checking the appropriate response:

1. On average, I spend the following amount of time in prayer each day:
- _____ Less than 5 minutes
- _____ 5-15 minutes

- _____ 15-30 minutes
- _____ 30-60 minutes
- _____ More than 1 hour

2. I feel that I should ideally spend _____ in prayer each day:

- _____ 5-15 minutes
- _____ 15-30 minutes
- _____ 30-60 minutes
- _____ More than 1 hour

3. My daily prayers are best characterized as:

- _____ Focused prayers at set times, e.g., morning prayer time
- _____ Focused prayers when situations arise
- _____ Spontaneous thoughts asking for God’s presence or assistance
- _____ An open-ended conversation with God having no specific beginning or ending

Please describe your preferences when engaging in prayer.

1. The ideal place (or setting) for me to focus on prayer is

2. My favorite posture (e.g., sitting, lying, walking, etc.) of prayer is

3. The best time of day for me to pray is

I, _____, understand that the above information is to be utilized in a Doctor of Ministry project through Garden-Webb University and directed by Pastor Randy McDaniel. I understand that any part of this survey’s data may be included in the research and subsequent publication. I understand that use of my survey data will be anonymous and do herein give my consent for this information to be used per the stipulations above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX F

Week 1 Devotion Materials

(Because of the formatting of this document it is impossible to present the devotions in the single-page-per-devotion form of their original delivery.)

Monday, August 22

Bible Reading:

Mark 10:13-16

Why do you think the disciples are rebuking parents for bringing children to Jesus?

What quality or qualities do children have that Jesus insists is essential for God's kingdom?

Reflection:

Richard Foster writes that there is a

...notion – almost universal among us modern high achievers – that we have to have everything “just right” in order to pray. That is, before we can really pray, our lives need some fine tuning, or we need to know more about how to pray, or we need to study the philosophical questions surrounding prayer, or we need to have a better grasp of the great traditions of prayer. And on it goes.³¹

I don't mean to undermine this study in prayer (which precisely seeks for a better grasp of the topic of prayer), but he has a point. Prayer is a simple conversation with God and should not be neglected because of any notions that you are not quite ready to take on this

³¹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 7.

exercise. It may sound silly but we are all stymied at times with exercise programs, home projects, career plans, and... yes, our prayer lives simply because we don't want to start where we are – we would like to start from some other place.

We must grasp what Foster calls “simple prayer.” Simple prayer is actually an acknowledgement that if you don't go to the Father with your desires, your concerns, and just the stuff that is on your mind, then you will likely not engage prayer with any frequency. You will keep waiting until the time is right. Additionally, there is an important point about simple prayer: not only must you jump in “where you are,” you must also not edit your prayers. Do you like speaking with someone where you are extremely careful about what you are going to say? Where you “edit” your thoughts before you allow them to come from your mouth? There is certainly a need for this in some conversations, but don't allow this to be your relationship with God. If you do, you will be worn out by the work of prayer.

Prayer

Use your prayer guide to cover the topics for “Monday”, but more importantly come to God for a time today in simple, unedited pray.

Journal³²

Tuesday, August 23

Bible Reading:

Luke 10:38-11:1

In your own words what is the lesson from the story of Mary and Martha?

Why do you think the disciples ask Jesus to teach them about prayer?

Reflection:

In your Bible reading for today I added to the story of Mary and Martha the first verse of chapter 11. Chapter 11 changes settings and begins with Jesus at prayer and his disciples requesting, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Often in Luke's gospel the subject of

³² Each day you will see the heading: “Journal.” Most of the time this will be an unguided exercise and you should feel free to write as much or as little as you like on any subject. Just write something that is on your mind if you have never done this before. Writing in a journal may not be your favorite thing, but give it a try.

prayer is addressed and Jesus himself is often seen at prayer. Clearly for the author there “is something to this prayer business.” I believe that Luke is captivated by prayer for 2 main reasons:

1. Prayer is a glorious and awesome opportunity to be in relationship with God, and comparatively all other considerations are diminished.
2. Only through prayer does the disciple have the resources to face challenges and even have adequate resources to survive.

Conversing with and spending time in the Lord’s presence are important priorities for disciples. It is so easy to agree with that statement, but practically speaking we often allow ourselves to become too busy. If you find yourself forgetting the importance of time with God, turn to the lesson of Mary and Martha and to the example of Jesus and His first disciples.

React to the reasons for prayer listed in the reflection above. Do you see your time spent with God as a vital, critical, and daily activity?

Prayer

“Tuesday” topics

Journal

Wednesday, August 24

Bible Reading:

Luke 11:2-4; Matthew 6:9-13

Reflection:

The Lukan *Lord’s Prayer* is noticeably different from the prayer recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. You probably have Matthew’s version memorized and probably prefer it. But, the unfamiliarity of Luke’s version might be helpful as you seek today to analyze these words which have been labeled the *Lord’s Prayer*, the *Pater Noster*, or the *Model Prayer*.

Father, hallowed be Thy name.
 Thy kingdom come
 Give us each day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our sins,
 For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us
 And lead us not into temptation.
 (Luke 11:2-4, NAS)

In order to best conceptualize what the *Model Prayer* instructs, paraphrase it line-by-line below:

For today, reflect on the very first word of the prayer. What is the significance of addressing God as “Father”? In your relationship with God, do you interact with Him as a child interacts with a loving father? If not, how do you interact with God? Is He a judge? Is He your buddy? Is He cold and aloof? Is He a business partner with whom you have regular board meetings?

Reflect on how you came to visualize and relate to God in the way that you do.

Prayer

“Wednesday” topics

Journal

Thursday, August 25

Bible Reading:

Luke 11:5-8

Imagine you are the one going to a friend at midnight to ask a favor. Is it awkward? Can you imagine something so important that you would do this?

Reflection:

In the Bible reading for today we have continued Jesus’ teaching on prayer. He has given His disciples a basic structure for praying, but now moves into this story. Jesus’ stories were masterful depictions (metaphors) meant to trigger the imagination. He could have explained his important principles of prayer in bullet-point fashion (I for one, could enjoy that!), but instead He virtually says, “Let me tell you a story because prayer works like this...”

The story which unfolds has two main characters who we will call by their traditional titles. A *petitioner* receives an unexpected guest at a late hour and finds himself insufficiently prepared to play his role of host. He does not have the main item of any meal of that time – bread. He seeks to remedy the situation by going to a friend’s house, variously called the *householder* or the *sleeper*, and requests assistance. But, it’s late. The householder tries to refuse the petitioner, but ultimately gives in because of what some versions translate as “persistence,” but what is actually best translated as “shamelessness.” Jesus ends his story.

What does this story mean to us? I believe that Jesus wants us to accept that we are talking about a situation of real friendship. I believe that the profound meaning of this story rests on the fact that the petitioner had a good case because he had a good friend. Good friends will come through for you in a pinch. But, the story makes it clear that in this particular situation friendship was not enough. The householder is not going to meet the need because of friendship, but he does meet the need because of some other consideration or motivation.

Many commentators see that this story advises that we should be persistent in prayer. We will talk somewhat about that tomorrow. I think this story taps into our ideas of friendship, namely the hope that someone would value us enough to meet our needs regardless of personal cost. But, we know in the real world that there will be limits to friendship. Yes, the petitioner got what he wanted, but it was not because of a great bond of friendship.

Jesus sets it up that people who take a risk and ask for their needs to be met, will sometimes get their requests. However, in the world the provider’s motivation or our perceived relationship to that person is no guarantee of success. With God it is different. He gives to those who ask. Additionally, His character is certain. He is too good and too loving to refuse requests based on selfish or petty motivations. I think Jesus is saying, “You think having a close friend is a good situation when you are in need? I’ve got one better for you: having God as your Father is the best possible situation when you are in need. Just ask!”

Prayer

“Thursday” topics

Journal

Friday, August 26

Bible Reading:

Luke 11:9-13

How do you feel about the teaching that states, “For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened”?

What do you do with this verse when you do not receive the thing for which you asked?

Reflection:

Today's Bible reading concludes the instruction on prayer. Let's review. Jesus' disciples are impressed by His prayer life and presumably His nearness to God. They want to be guided in prayer – a request that Jesus immediately honors. In our modern English Bibles Jesus' teaching occupies twelve verses (verses 2-13). The first three verses are the Model Prayer and clearly answer the petition, "Lord, teach us to pray." But, the other 75% of His response does not address how disciples are to pray. The last nine verses drive a point home: Ask because your Father is good. I think that Jesus' point is that instruction is good, but knowing the character of the One prayed to, is better.

This really fits with the entire concept of being a disciple of Christ. It comes down to a relationship more than principles, rules, techniques, or religious practices. If our hearts begin to move in love toward this Father, who is infinitely good – so good He will give His very presence as the Holy Spirit (v.13), then so much will fall in line. Practically speaking, the real vitality in your Christian life and your prayer life will come from a deepening of this two-way love relationship. Real vitality cannot come from merely learning more about Christian principles or beliefs, or by learning to pray in a more sophisticated manner. People are all the time buying into this fraud. It's called *empty religion*.

We began the week talking about *simple prayer* and it is here I would like to conclude. Simple prayer is starting "where you are" and generally speaking to God as one who is a loving Father. He values that time which we give to Him in prayer. We can learn much that will help us to pray more effectively, but we will never outgrow the basics: God is offering you – not some future you, not some perfectly well-behaved, high-achieving you – the opportunity to be in relationship with Him. He will not disappoint.

Prayer

"Friday" topics

Journal

Saturday, August 27

Bible Reading:

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You choose. Take note of anything which impressed you in prayer today.

Journal

Sunday, August 28

Bible Reading:

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You choose. Take note of anything which impressed you in prayer today.

Journal

APPENDIX G

Prayer and Bible Reading Guide

Members of Groups 1 and 2 were given a pair of resources for checking off daily Bible readings and (more importantly) for covering systematically various topics in prayer. I created this guide as a resource for the congregation several years previous to the experiment, but reintroduced it in August 2011 to accompany the study. The full guide is not reproduced here, only the section which focused prayer for Monday-Friday.

Prayer Guide

Monday

Individuals/Families/Society

Finances
Depressed
Hospitalized/Sick/terminal illness
Homebound
Grieving
Elderly

Tuesday

Individuals/Families/Society

Poor
Those suffering injustice
Families
Children/teenagers
Single parents
Lost and searching

Wednesday

Community/World

Floyd
New River Valley
Virginia
Nation
World

Thursday

Church
Ministries
Pastor and other leadership
Worship Services
Finances
Evangelism
Church growth
The Churches of Floyd

Friday

Christian growth
Attitude of love
Attitude of service
Attitude of forgiveness
Growth/maturity
Awareness of hurting/lost
Courage to be a witness
Teachable spirit

APPENDIX H

Week 2 Devotion Materials

Monday, August 29

Bible Reading:

Psalm 100

List words from Psalm 100 which evoke from you positive feelings and thoughts:

Reflection:

There is much celebratory emotion in Psalm 100. It would probably be very productive for many of us to allow this message to sink in. Perhaps the burdens we shoulder today would be lessened by some concentrated effort at praise and thanksgiving. Sometimes we are crushed underneath our fixations with our sufferings and anxieties. In some cases our problems are real enough and pressing enough that we will have a difficult time considering anything else. However, much of the time we have a choice – maybe even all of the time. We have a choice of whether we will focus on troublesome things or excessively grave matters. Or instead we can choose to erupt in praise and thanksgiving. So doing, we will often experience an uplifting from those dark thoughts. We will talk more about that this week, but for now I want to focus on what might be considered a minor theme in Psalm 100.

This Psalm uses a common illustration identifying people as “sheep.” I don’t know a great deal about sheep, but I know some things I have heard along the way. These domesticated animals really need humans to thrive. They have no natural defenses – like claws and powerful teeth and jaws – and will not last long in the wild due to predators. Sheep need to be protected and led about for food and water. That’s the extent of my thoughts on sheep.

I have more thoughts on another domesticated animal: the family dog. I have been observing our dog (Molly) for over 8 years now and I could be wrong, but she has never once laid awake at night worrying about the future. Additionally, she is seemingly happy and really knows how to enjoy time spent with family, or time spent alone lying in the sun taking a nap. She doesn’t “put on airs” or “get too big for her britches” or any of

those ways in which we describe someone who is fooled into believing he or she is better than other people. She doesn't think she is in control of things. Molly is just a simple dog and not unusual.

Perhaps we struggle with our joy because we just won't accept what Psalm 100:3 says. We are convinced that everything depends on us. We are anxious about having our needs met. But the psalmist says that we are "sheep" and, as I have illustrated, sheep and other animals simply do not act like things depend on them, nor are they anxious. I guess what I am trying to say is that there is something important in this simple image of being a sheep in God's pasture. Maybe by thinking on it we can experience some joy and thanksgiving.

Prayer

Begin today's prayer through the gateway of thanksgiving and praise. Move onto "Monday" topics and any additional prayer concerns you may have.

Journal

Tuesday, August 30

Bible Reading:

Luke 2:13-20; Luke 10:21; Luke 15:8-9; Luke 17:11-19

What kind of words might you use in describing the mood in the above passages?

Are you a joyful person? When was the last time you had a joyful outburst?

Reflection:

I believe that there is a very real possibility that you are willing to acknowledge that joy, gratitude, and praise are aspects of prayer, but you will move through this lesson looking forward to a lesson on petition, or forgiveness, or a teaching about some technique or deep truth in prayer. For most of us, joy, thanksgiving, and other emotionally exuberant topics don't seem to fit with the serious business of our lives. Sure, most everyone likes to have fun, but we tend to invest in those emotions most when we are vacationing or getting off work on Friday afternoon. We don't tend to consider how central the experiences of joy, gratitude, and praise are to our lives as disciples. C.S.

Lewis goes far in contradicting our stodginess about spirituality and the kingdom of God by asserting, “Joy is the serious business of Heaven.”³³

Failure to embrace the joy (which is a fruit of life in the Holy Spirit – see Galatians 5), has dire consequences. Human beings have a need to celebrate and be joyful. When we suppress this – or ignore it – we create a void in our lives. Subconsciously (and later actively) we begin to go “on the prowl” for something which will fill that void, regardless of whether it is a healthy or unhealthy pursuit. It is the way we are wired emotionally and so I advise that we take today’s topic seriously.

We should all work at our gratitude and our praise. God has richly blessed each of us. We can thank him for many material benefits, or for relationships, or for a beautiful sunrise, forgiveness and freedom from guilt, and the list goes on. Gratitude in prayer is a learned skill and the more it is rehearsed the more the feeling of joy grows in your life.

Prayer

“Tuesday” topics and additionally practice joy, gratitude, and praise in you prayer time today.

Journal

Wednesday, August 31

Bible Reading:

Matthew 13:44 / Philippians 3:7-8

Both passages describe letting go of something in order to receive something of inestimable worth – fellowship with God and the experience of His kingdom and righteousness here on earth. Generally speaking, what are some things people must let go of in order to receive God’s blessing?

What do you need to let go of in order to experience joyful newness in your relationship with God?

Reflection:

³³ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer; Reflections on the Intimate Dialogue Between Man and God* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1992), 93.

Sometimes joy is best experienced when it comes as relief – when a problem is resolved. We feel liberated and hopeful. When someone intervenes in our crisis and offers much needed help we see a brightening in our outlook, we feel gratitude that we were lifted up, and we feel joy. This is what happens to us when God forgives our sins and supplies our needs through his loving and miraculous power. It is an experience of joy that is fueled by our relief and newly received sense of hope. The natural consequence of God’s presence in our lives is not only joy, but an outpouring of adoration.

Prayers of praise and adoration are hard for some people. Not prone to lavish emotions, some folks shy away from praise, worship, and expressing feelings of adoration toward God. Regardless of your emotional makeup, nothing is more natural for all people than to release toward God words, thoughts, and feelings of adoration. After all, He has liberated you by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross! He has promised Himself as an eternal companion. He has pledged Himself as a loving Father who meets the needs and cares of His children far better than any earthly father could manage. God’s work – if we will let Him – is one of liberation and the dawning of joy in our hearts.

Go on and gush a little bit in your prayers today! You and I have “got it made” in Jesus Christ! So let the words of adoration and gratitude flow!

Prayer

“Wednesday” topics

Journal

Thursday, September 1

Bible Reading:

Psalm 1; Psalm 19:14; Psalm 119:97-99

In Psalm 1, what is the outcome of “meditating” on God’s law night and day? (Hint: verse 3)

Could you describe your life as a tree in full leaf planted by the streams of water and bearing fruit? Spend a moment thinking about what your life would look like if this description was applicable to you.

Reflection:

It is a shame that many Christians get uncomfortable at the idea of meditation. Many assume that meditation is strictly an exercise which comes to us from Eastern religions. In this practice of meditation one attempts to empty the mind in order to establish some sort of inner peace and cosmic tranquility. Occasionally I hear someone say (usually non-Christian) that daily meditation has been helpful in relieving stress, anxiety, anger, and more. I have no reason to criticize what they are doing. Maybe it would be beneficial for all of us to learn some techniques which would allow our brains to stop racing and idle for a bit. But this kind of “brain idling” is not exactly in the Christian tradition of meditation.

People of biblical times and people throughout the ages in the Christian church have understood that there is a meditation which is necessary and helpful to the cultivation of faith. It was not just about relaxation, which might be a byproduct, but about “murmuring”, “musing”, and “rolling around” God’s truth and revelation in our minds. This meditation is not analysis or Bible study – it is not an intellectual exercise. It has been at times compared (somewhat coarsely) to the image of a cow chewing a cud.³⁴ Over and over again the truth (or cud) is chewed upon without any sort of urgency. Meditation has its affect – nourishment – just as does the chewing of the cud.

Meditating on scripture is an excellent practice in prayer whereby we read, reflect, and allow the truth to sink in. When we undertake this form of prayer we are in essence ceasing from the striving, high-achieving mentality that we bring to so many things, even the prayer life, and we invite God to do transformation. By “musing” and “murmuring” over truth during prayer time, or throughout the day, we begin to experience change in our thoughts and in our feelings. The Word is taking root and is making us healthy. It’s kind of like a tree planted by the waters...

Prayer

“Thursday” topics

Journal

Friday, September 2

Today we will start with the “Reflection.”

Reflection:

Yesterday’s devotion was a prelude to a more in-depth teaching regarding a method of prayer known as *Lectio Divina*. I encounter few people outside of the clergy –

³⁴ Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 25.

who learned about this in their seminary training – who actually know or practice this method of encountering God. The method dates back to the 4th and 5th centuries and has been used widely by clergy, monks, and laity. The staying power of this method (I believe) is due to a crucial shift in the understanding of prayer time. Prayer time for many of us devolves into a monologue – it’s all one way. We speak, and speak, and speak. When we are finished we say, “I have said my prayers.” And we are exactly right. We have not had a conversation with God, nor have we even typically been open to the idea that God might want to communicate with something more substantial than warm, fuzzy feelings. *Lectio Divina* is prayer, but it is far from monologue. Marjorie Thompson states, “The purpose of this reading is to let yourself be addressed by the living God.”³⁵

A good translation of the Latin phrase *Lectio Divina* would be “sacred reading.” This technique has also been called “spiritual reading” and can be done with any devotional classic, but is usually practiced with the Bible. The process during one’s prayer time would unfold like this:

1. A short passage is selected and read slowly. There are many ways to describe what you are trying to do in this reading. Probably the most helpful thing that can be said is that you are not reading to gather information, analyze, or cover a large amount of material. *Lectio Divina* is not the place for doing your daily requirement in your effort to read through the Bible in a year. You may want to read this small passage aloud and you will likely read it over and again, pausing and repeating words and phrases which get your attention. You are seeking to be addressed by God.
2. The next step is meditation. As I said yesterday, meditation is this act of “murmuring” over the words read. The goal of this phase is to

...welcome the Word of God into our lives and turn it from a dead word into the living word and presence of God... Through meditation we discover the beauty and goodness of God’s truth and apply it to our own situation and needs.³⁶

Search your feelings and reactions, but most of all personalize some part of this Scripture. It is a message to you.

3. Up until now, you have been receiving. The next step elicits a response from you. At this time you engage in a more conventional time of “prayer.” About this phase Thompson eloquently says:

Perhaps the Word has touched our pain, and we cry out in hurt, anger or frustration; perhaps God has revealed our sin, and we

³⁵ Thompson, 26.

³⁶ Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms For Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Open Door, 1991), 33-34.

whisper in confession and repentance; perhaps the Word has evoked gratitude, and our words leap up in thanksgiving; perhaps it has sparked our joy; and we sing out adoration and praise!³⁷

We give voice to our thoughts and feelings.

4. Having completed three stages of the *Lectio Divina*, the fourth and final one is “contemplation.” Some writers might describe this time as trying to “seal one’s self in mystical union” with God, or that this time is “reconciliation to the truths encountered” in the *Lectio Divina*. That is too abstract an idea for me, so let me explain what this concluding exercise means to me. By this time in our prayer we have wrestled, struggled, emoted, and just generally voiced what was in our hearts and minds. We *have been* addressed and *have* addressed. This is (for me) the silence and the decompression. It is rest and lingering in the presence of God. It is like when you have conversed with a friend long enough and the words are over for now. What remains is the two of you in that place still connected, but requiring no more speech. Though it is hard to articulate, our spirits yearn for this connection which transcends our many words.

Bible Reading / Prayer

Now practice the *Lectio Divina* with the following passage: **Ephesians 3:14-20**. I won’t prescribe a specific amount of time, but if you do this exercise in 5 minutes or less, I am sure you are hurrying too much. When finished turn to “Friday” topics and any other concerns.

Journal

Saturday, September 3

Bible Reading:

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

³⁷ Thompson, 24.

Prayer

You choose. Take note of anything which impressed you in prayer today.

Journal

Sunday, September 4

Bible Reading:

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You choose. Take note of anything which impressed you in prayer today.

Journal

APPENDIX I

Week 3 Devotion Materials

Monday, September 5

Reflection:

The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century. A distinctive characteristic of this religious order is their mission focus – the commitment to go into the world and serve where asked. Central to Jesuit spirituality (which would typically be referred to as “Ignatian spirituality”) is prayer which is aided and guided by Ignatius’ foundational work – *The Spiritual Exercises*. To access a copy of *The Spiritual Exercises* online and to learn more about Jesuits, go to www.jesuits.org.

Some cursory background material is helpful as today we are talking about “Ignatian prayer.” In the book *Prayer and Temperament: Different Forms for Different Personality Types* Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey explored four types of prayer, labeling these forms with a representative figure from church history. The authors considered that St. Ignatius of Loyola had a certain style in prayer and spiritual reflection, which was detailed in his writings and in the spirituality and practice of later followers. In other words, it is possible to label a certain approach and practice as “Ignatian spirituality.”

So, what is “Ignatian prayer?” This method contains two basic parts: 1) You recall a story of God’s revelation in the world, i.e., read a biblical story or some other revealed truth in the pages of Scripture. 2) You place *yourself* in the story. The purpose of this exercise in prayer is to make the truth personal. This is not an exercise which suggests that biblical revelation is all about you, but it does help us to remember that these revelations can speak enormously to our own circumstances. This practice in prayer has a belief, which I agree with, that God’s word is living and active. The Holy Spirit wants to speak this ancient revelation afresh for you and me. How better to experience one of these stories than to place yourself as a character in that story? As you begin to practice Ignatian prayer, select a story from the Bible with characters and use your imagination. Think about feelings, motivations, and choices. Reflect on these things and ask the Holy Spirit to make the story with all of its power and impact to come to life.

Bible Reading:

Pick any of the numerous scenes and story lines from Matthew 26 and practice Ignatian prayer. You may choose to do what I did: I read the whole chapter and kept pausing in the various scenes considering the perspectives of Jesus, Peter, Judas, the religious leaders, etc.

What scene in Matthew 26 do you gravitate towards? Why? What might God be saying to you?

Prayer

“Monday” topics and any additional prayer concerns you may have.

Journal

Tuesday, September 6

Bible Reading:

Philippians 4:4-9

Which words or ideas expressed by Paul are words of encouragement for you today?

Reflection:

Today’s reflection begins the topics of petition and supplication in prayer. When we ask God for the things we want, we are making “petitions.” Some teachers would distinguish prayers of petition and prayers of intercession in this way: we make petitions for our own needs and intercessions for the needs of others. In a very general sense, petition and supplication are exercises in asking for the “whatever” and “whomever” we have in mind.

Some people consider prayers of petition to be a lower form of prayer. They believe it is unbecoming (and maybe even distasteful) for God’s children to be coming to Him with all of this asking and neediness. Donald Bloesch in *The Struggle of Prayer* recognizes objections to petitionary prayer and answers the concern from a variety of historical perspectives. Bloesch writes that Augustine, “in his sermons recommends the prayer of ‘crying out’ as the best way to meet temptation: ‘How deep in the deep are they who do not cry out of the deep.’” Furthermore Bloesch writes,

For Luther, the most powerful prayer is “prayed with sobs and tears.” Because God is at the same time almighty and compassionate, he desires to hear supplications from his children. As Luther put it, “The Lord is great and high, and therefore He wants great things to be sought from Him and is willing to bestow them so that His almighty power might be shown forth.”³⁸

We could spend much more time justifying prayers of petition, but suffice it to say that many Christians have considered the topic, studied the Scriptures, and concluded that we should in fact pray for the things which we want and need.

Are you ready and able to accept that God wants to hear your petitions today?

Prayer

“Tuesday” topics.

Journal

Wednesday, September 7

Bible Reading:

James 5:13-18

Have you ever prayed fervently for something (like a healing) which seemed to go unanswered?

James insists Christians should engage in prayers for healing and for forgiveness. He closes the section surprisingly with the prophet Elijah. What is the point of calling to mind Elijah?

Reflection:

There have been a few times in my life where I have thrown my will and faith into a prayer and insisted that God grant me the outcome which I desire. I have not done this often, nor have I done this lightly. There is just too much at stake. Take for instance a scenario (which I have experienced) of the person in a congregation who is diagnosed

³⁸ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Struggle of Prayer*, (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1988), 68.

with cancer and approaches the church leaders with James 5:14. James does not hedge or qualify his statement that if anyone is sick “Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick.” Armed with this passage of Scripture and the great need of a member in the congregation, we conducted an evening “healing service.” We had worship, we had times of free, undirected prayer from those present, and finally we had the anointing with oil of the sick person and the laying on of hands. It was very moving and from a totally utilitarian perspective – totally futile. Our cancer victim continued with chemotherapy having good days and bad days. Within a few years (right along with the initial prognosis), she was dead. Going “all in” on a prayer can break your heart.

The above scenario described “intercessory prayer” – a topic we will consider in the weeks ahead. “Petitionary prayer” – this week’s subject – has the same possibility that we will ask desperately for something and instead of our desired outcome, we experience a complete disappointment and the inevitable feelings of anger. Every time this has happened to me I have thought, “God, I did not need to get emotionally extended in hope like that. I could have had that disappointing outcome minus all of that expectation that You would intervene.”

We have all experienced unanswered prayers. It is important for us to grapple with this difficult topic and on tomorrow’s reflection I will share some of my thoughts as well as some thoughts from author Philip Yancey. However, I warn you this is not an entirely satisfying conversation because there are no complete answers for why your particular prayer did not get answered.

Prayer

“Wednesday” topics. Additionally, utilize the Ignatian prayer technique to recognize that you stand before God with the same access as the prophet Elijah. That should inspire some confidence!

Journal

Thursday, September 8

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-18

Many things can lead to frustration with God like Jeremiah’s experience of persecution for doing what God called him to do. Unanswered prayer might be a source of frustration for you, or it might be something different. What frustration is hindering you today?

Reflection:

About “unanswered prayer”, Philip Yancey begins with the idea of “frivolous prayers.”³⁹ If you want “a sunny day for the soccer match” or you are a smoker who prays, “Protect me from lung cancer,” you are offering frivolous prayers. If we trivialize prayer conceiving that God is there to make everything nice for us, prayer will become robbed of its potency.

Second, unanswered prayer may be related to sin or impure motivations. Due to sin, God may not jump to our rescue the first time we cry out for help. Likewise, if we are asking with impure motivations, such as “greed”, God will not answer. However, you and I are not perfect, nor will we always get our motivations right – we are human. Don’t always assume God doesn’t hear you because you are flawed. If that’s the way it works, we are all in trouble!

Third, Yancey offers the idea of “contradictory prayers.” You realize of course that when several Christians pray to get the same job, ultimately all but one are going to be disappointed. It is ironic that some people may brood the rest of their lives about God’s unanswered prayer for that ideal job, while one person may forever testify to God’s gracious provision.

Fourth, unanswered prayer might in some cases be a bigger blessing than the fulfillment of your request. Jesus prayed before His arrest that “if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.” He deferred to God’s will recognizing that His avoidance of suffering might be an inferior request in the scope of things. We should defer to God’s grand plans. However, we must guard against a weak form of prayer that never really makes a request without backpedaling to say, “If you don’t want to answer this prayer, You know best.” (More about this tomorrow.)

Fifth, prayer is simply not a magical power we possess. What would happen if when you really wanted something, you fasted, you prayed fervently, and generally said that on this particular prayer you “were not kidding around”? You got what you wanted. Again something comes up and you repeat the previous method of petition and ... you got what you wanted. If it always worked that way, you would possess a magical power. It doesn’t matter that you are claiming God as the author of the power; it is still at your disposal to get supernatural results anytime “you were not kidding around.” You and I can never approach a prayer request with 100% certainty. We are dependent on God to provide the solution.

All of these things point to one big idea: God is God; we are not. We are assured in Scripture that God loves us and that He is working His redemptive purposes in the world. Beyond that, I cannot say why a prayer doesn’t get answered. I suppose we are asked at those times to simply trust. I know there are many questions or even objections, but these things are enough to consider for now.

Prayer: “Thursday” topics

Journal

³⁹ Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 222-231.

Friday, September 9

Bible Reading: Matthew 21:21-22; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Is unanswered prayer always a problem of a lack of faith? (Mt 21:22)

Has God ever given you a “thorn in the flesh” that must be endured instead of removed?

Reflection:

For today’s reflection I want to address two obstacles to offering petitionary prayer: 1) Why should I ask if God knows my needs and already has a plan? 2) Why should I bother God with my prayers? Nothing can bring an effort at establishing a serious prayer life to a halt like these two ideas floating around in the background. These ideas are really speculations that prayer is pointless. It’s impossible to get excited about an exercise in futility.

I mentioned yesterday that some people (at best) will offer a form of Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He made his preferential request and followed it with deference: “Your will; not mine.” Clearly this is a model in prayer – but it is not the only one. I see in Scripture that we are to pray in confident faith as in Matthew 21:21-22 cited above. I see that we are to pray and not be discouraged as in the story from Luke 18:1-8 of the persistent widow and the unrighteous judge. It seems that we are told time and again to assert our faith and believe! Even in our other example from today’s Bible reading, the prayer was offered for the removal of the thorn in the flesh with no upfront deference and uncertainty regarding the will of God. In the immediate need Paul simply asked repeatedly (without backpedaling) and was ultimately denied.

This discussion leads us to the larger question of “Why should I ask if God knows the needs and already has a plan?” Likewise, we are ready to address the question: “Why should I bother God with my prayers?” Implied in this latter question is a belief that our prayers are not worthy of His attention given that He is running the universe. I am not going to load you up with a string of Scriptures which demonstrate that God heeds the prayers of His people, and even in some cases changes His mind or relents in His stated intentions. I am not going to make a biblical case for God’s concern for our needs regardless of whether we see these needs as important or unimportant. Rather than surveying the Scriptures, we need only probe our understanding of God for a vital clue.

In creating us, God did not just create a world full of helpless dependents. He created people who could be in relationship with Him and, furthermore, who could be co-laborers with Him in seeing the world redeemed. God doesn’t *need* to include you and me; it’s just that He *decided* to include you and me. God takes pleasure in sharing His

plans and the process of His kingdom being manifested on earth. If you think about it this way, it is entirely off-base to think of prayer as futile – to think that God has already worked it all out and doesn't need to hear from me. God discloses Himself and His plans, and we too should share our lives in return with Him.

Prayer: "Friday" topics

Journal

Saturday, September 10

Bible Reading:

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You might practice *Lectio Divina* or *Ignatian Prayer* and record your experience.

Journal

Sunday, September 11

Bible Reading:

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You choose. Take note of anything which impressed you in prayer today.

Journal

APPENDIX J

Week 4 Devotion Materials

Monday, September 12

Reflection: Augustinian Prayer

Augustine is one of the most influential thinkers and writers in Christian history. He was bishop of Hippo – an area of northern Africa – in the 4th and 5th centuries. Augustine’s impact was immense on the early monasteries particularly in his method of prayer and spirituality.

The Augustinian method of prayer as described in *Prayer and Temperament: Different Forms for Different Personality Types* seeks to bring the words to life here and now in the mind of the prayer. Ignatian prayer, you will recall, endeavors to place one’s self in the story.

In Augustinian Prayer, one uses creative imagination to transpose the words of Sacred Scripture to our situation today. One tries to imagine (intuit) what meaning the words of Scripture would have if Jesus Christ, or God the Father, or the Holy Spirit appeared and spoke them to us at this moment. In Augustinian Prayer we try to think of the words of the Bible as though they were a personal letter from God addressed to each one of us. Only secondarily are we concerned about the original, historical meaning of a text of Scripture; our primary concern during Augustinian Prayer is trying to discern what meaning these revealed words have for us today.⁴⁰

Until we pray through passages of Scripture asking God for a personal revelation, the words lack significance and meaning. When we receive a revelation from God from the Bible and we recognize we have been addressed personally we are empowered, strengthened, and guided. Talking to a friend today, we both agreed that there is great need in God giving us a “word” in times of difficulty. Without this personal word from God you do not know what to place your faith in and do not know in any specific way what God is working on or toward. During many challenging times God has spoken a word from the Bible which gave me assurance. In one particular season of my life the

⁴⁰ Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms For Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Open Door, 1991), 58.

words from 2 Corinthians 4:17 were constantly sounding in my thoughts: “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.” This word gave me a “God’s-eye-view.” It helped me to endure suffering because it made my suffering meaningful in light of God’s eternal purposes.

We’ve got to have a revelation from God at times and Augustinian prayer may be the means of receiving it.

Bible Reading:

Read Isaiah 43:1-7 practicing Augustinian prayer.

Prayer

“Monday” topics and any additional prayer concerns you may have.

Journal

Tuesday, September 13

Bible Reading: Psalm 32:1-5; 1 John 1:9

Have you ever been disappointed with yourself over your sins?

Do you believe that confession can be as simple as 1 John 1:9 states?

Do you need to open up to God regarding your sins and receive forgiveness?

Reflection: Prayers of Confession

An important component of every person’s prayer life will be prayers of confession. We can call our failures to measure up to God’s ethical and behavioral standards *debts*, *trespasses*, or *sins*. Regardless the label, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that the plight of humankind is a breach with God caused by our unrighteousness. Being separated from God by our sins is a condition (whether we will admit it or not) that robs our lives of peace. Sin is destructive and must be confessed and cleansed in order for us to experience life as God meant it to be.

There is nothing inherently complicated about prayers of confession and forgiveness. We must take a regular inventory of the ways in which we have broken God’s commands and the ways in which we have failed other people. It is a simple business of dealing with our brokenness, but one that becomes excessively problematic when we mix up prayers of confession with the idea of “feeling sorry.”

Too often our sins or the sins of others become situations loaded with emotion. In the grip of intensely negative feelings, we either avoid thinking of the sins altogether or

we acknowledge the existence of the sin, but refuse to pray. Whether it is anger or guilt and shame, we can become easily stymied into prayerlessness because of unresolved feelings. The critical thing to remember is that we don't pray for forgiveness when we feel sorry enough or convicted enough or feel that we can promise God it will never happen again. We pray accepting the forgiveness God offers and depend on Him to begin the process of healing. It may mean that we continue to deal with unruly feelings or temptations, but we have taken the only possible step we can take on the road to reconciliation – we have laid claim to forgiveness. If we need to confess it again tomorrow, we do it.

One final image before I conclude. Sin is a kind of sickness, but not the kind that goes away after a short period of time. Sin is a sickness that will cause a lack of spiritual health and vitality and it will inevitably grow. Some people have a reluctance to go to the doctor when they perceive that something is wrong with their health – I am one of them. But let us not have any reluctance or false hopes about sin-sickness. It must be brought to God, who like a doctor or surgeon will address the very core of the illness. We present the sin to God and He takes action. I could never hope to thoroughly explain how He does what He does, but with each prayer of confession He removes the sickness (at least a little) and works healing into our lives.

Prayer

“Tuesday” topics.

Journal

Wednesday, September 14

Bible Reading:

1 Peter 2:19-25; 1 Peter 3:8-18; 1 Peter 4:7-11

What speaks the most to you in these passages?

How hard is “giving a blessing” instead of “paying back evil for evil”?

Reflection: The Problem of Unforgiveness

When we think of suffering for our faith we often have visions of people experiencing persecution as missionaries in a country which is hostile toward Christianity. Or we might think of being a witness and not going along with the crowd at work, and consequently we are ridiculed or ostracized. I think that suffering for the Christian faith is much closer to home. I believe that suffering is for many Christians a

daily appointment. What could cause suffering to be such an integral part of faith? The answer is: loving and forgiving people.

Being gentle, compassionate, loving, and forgiving is extremely hard work. Sometimes, I believe, it is harder work than taking a defiant stance to preach the gospel. I remember once trying in vain to affirm and show some love to – of all things – a street preacher. He was standing on a busy sidewalk with a sandwich board, which demanded repentance, and he was verbally exhorting people to change their ways. I was impressed at what one of my brothers in Christ was doing to take evangelism seriously and wanted to let him know: “Good job!” My new friend however had no social skills; he had no warmth or concern for my affirmation; he had no interest in me at all. He was as caustic and unpleasant talking with me as he was with his proclamation of the “love of Jesus” to passersby. That’s a distortion because he never once mentioned the “love of Jesus.” My point: perhaps our vision of doing grand things for the gospel and suffering for the faith pale in comparison to the simple challenges of being gracious, personable, loving, and what I am going to speak of next – forgiving.

When we come before God seeking to reconnect with the Heavenly Father, we invariably need forgiveness for our sins. Forgiveness must flow in a relationship. Of course God does nothing which requires forgiveness, so it is typically* just our burden to set the relationship right by seeking forgiveness. The situation substantially changes in our relationships with other people. There is often the need for forgiveness to flow in both directions. However, we all know what it is like to have a situation which is jammed up by unforgiveness. Forgiveness becomes unavoidable (and often painful) work. To walk in love and forgiveness is to deny your own desires and to suffer.

All of this discussion about love, forgiveness, and suffering is meant to bring some things to light. We must forgive other people regardless of our emotions. We have to launch out there and if at times it seems impossibly hard, be reminded that it IS hard. It is dying to one’s self and it is the example we see in Jesus.

Prayer

“Wednesday” topics. When you are confessing, make sure you deal with any unforgiveness in your life.

Journal

*I say “typically” because some people need to open up to God by starting with forgiving Him.

Thursday, September 15

Bible Reading: Matthew 17:14-21; Acts 13:1-3

What is the longest time you have gone without food? _____

Reflection: Fasting

Fasting involves a deliberate refraining from food for spiritual reasons and, not surprisingly, this practice is at times uncomfortable. However, it is not the discomfort which has made the practice of fasting scarce in many churches today, it is a lack of understanding combined with pragmatism. The questions are there on some level: “What is fasting and what good is it?” Fasting is good for a variety of reasons and is a practice worth reviving.

Three basic types of fasts are gleaned from biblical accounts. Moses while on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34) goes without food or water for forty days in God’s presence. This form of extreme fast is not a model to be copied. Moses was supernaturally aided and would not have survived beyond a few days without water. However, it is important to note that forty day fasts with fluids and no food have been accomplished many times over. I even have a pastor friend who completed a forty day fast in the winter of 2010.

In another biblical account the prophet Daniel refused the king’s delicacies opting instead to eat only vegetables and drink water (Daniel 1). Daniel’s example has served as a model for a second type of fast – one which involves eating minimally and refraining from anything which might be considered a delicacy. Giving up certain foods during Lent is a minor form of this fast.

Finally, the Bible offers many stories of individuals refraining from all food (but not water) for varying lengths of time as a sign of contrition or as an attempt at dedicating one’s self to spiritual things. In Jesus’ time, fasting was such a normal part of religious life that He addresses the practice and gives some direction on how to engage it properly (Matthew 6:16-18).

With these biblical models in mind, we can now turn to the contemporary scene of Christian fasting. The most basic fast is not very long, but is still very challenging for most people. The 24 hour fast is the most common and is usually done by eating supper prior to the fast and then going without food until supper the following evening. Drinking only water would be the purest form of the 24 hour fast, but some people do choose to supplement through drinking juices or other caloric beverages.

That is the “how-to”, but there still remains the question of “Why fast?” Three things come to mind for our reflection today.

1. Fasting is an act of humility and is utilized when we want to seek forgiveness for sin. When we fast in contrition we seek to be purified and come under the holiness of God.
2. Fasting can help us to discern better the will of God. There is something about the practice which opens our spiritual eyes and ears.
3. Fasting can make prayer more effective. The biblical example is clear that prayers have additional emphasis when accompanied by fasting. Of course we must remember that fasting does not guarantee we will receive our requests.

Prayer: “Thursday” topics

Journal

Friday, September 16

Bible Reading: Ezra 9:5-10:1

What do you think about the value of a corporate prayer of confession like this one in Ezra's time?

Reflection: Prayers in Worship

It has always been understood throughout church history that one of the main components of a worship service was prayer. There is no guarantee that a prayer is more efficacious when you add greater numbers of people praying, but it does seem (particularly in Acts) that there is something important about a unified church joining together in prayer. How the contemporary church comes together and prays is the topic of today's reflection.

Prepared vs. Extemporaneous Prayers

For many people prayer seems to lack authenticity when it is planned and read. It is a similar reaction that some may have with the idea that a husband might give his wife a card for their anniversary and not personalize it in any way. It doesn't matter to some people that what was printed in the card was well-said, it was just impersonal. There are many nuances to consider in the "prepared vs. extemporaneous prayer" debate, but we really must not decide outright that one is categorically better than the other. They are just different.

In worship we can all benefit from a carefully thought out prayer which has been passed along through the years and is read in worship. Also, we can benefit from a prayer that has been laboriously crafted on Saturday night and read on Sunday morning. The argument in favor of planning and reading prayers is that it leaves little to chance – like a momentary mental lapse – and exactly what was intended is said. On the other hand there is always a danger with planned prayers (as in all elements of a heavily planned and structured worship service) that things will proceed thoughtlessly in worship as everyone is on "auto-pilot." An extemporaneous prayer requires (if done properly) for the one praying to bring a very fresh and timely prayer to the congregation. Additionally offering extemporaneous prayers models for the congregation how we all should pause and pray "from the heart" and not depend on prayers learned by rote or read from a book.

Given these things we can offer reasonable advice regarding how to engage corporate prayer: Use both prepared and extemporaneous prayers! We can keep things fresh and make our worship prayers very meaningful as we vary our practice.

Types of Corporate Prayer

The following is a short list of prayers engaged in worship services with explanations. Several of these have been discussed elsewhere from a private prayer perspective, so my goal here is to simply recast the prayer in light of corporate worship.

- Prayer of Invocation – God is never absent from anyplace, but it is appropriate for the people of God to gather in worship and begin with an invitation and reminder which delineates that this is “God’s space and God’s time.” The Prayer of Invocation “invokes” God to manifest Himself in this worship time.
- Prayer of Thanksgiving – We can all be so negligent of our blessings. The Prayer of Thanksgiving brings the focus to gratitude whether we are feeling it or not.
- Prayer of Confession – There is power in corporate confession, times of silence for confession, or simply being present in the service while a leader confesses the general nature of our sinfulness.
- Prayer of Petition – In gathering together we ask for God’s provision in various ways. Doing this together is a good practice which draws our focus from much personal neediness to a vision of the needs of God’s people and the world beyond our walls.

Prayer: “Friday” topics

Journal

Saturday, September 17

Bible Reading:

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You might practice *Lectio Divina*, *Ignatian*, or *Augustinian Prayer* and record your experience.

Journal

Sunday, September 18

Bible Reading:

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You choose. Take note of anything which impressed you in prayer today.

Journal

APPENDIX K

Week 5 Devotion Materials

Monday, September 19

Reflection: Franciscan Prayer

St. Francis of Assisi was born into wealth in Italy in 1181/2 and died in 1226. Because of a great spiritual transformation early in life, Francis renounced worldly possessions and became a widely recognized leader in the church. His legacy today consists of many things, but the most obvious is the enduring Franciscan Order of the Catholic Church which bears his name. The rule by which these friars live even today is one of devotion to God, but also one of voluntary poverty. Two words come to mind when considering Franciscan spirituality: compassion and generosity.⁴¹

The Franciscan method of prayer as described in *Prayer and Temperament: Different Forms for Different Personality Types* “makes full use of the five senses and will be flexible and free-flowing.”⁴² The person praying in this way seeks to see “God in the whole of creation” and can “make a fruitful meditation on the beauty of a flower, a meadow, a lake, a waterfall, a mountain, the ocean, or any event of nature such as sunrises and sunsets, the changes of seasons.” The person attracted to Franciscan prayer is one who seeks to identify God through creation and to give practical service to people in love. A Franciscan is not one who bothers with abstractions and theories but is rather moved to concretely put into practice Jesus’ teaching.

To practice the Franciscan method of prayer is to engage the senses. Look at creation and declare, “This is God’s handiwork.” See a need and in meeting it say, “These are Christ’s hands which are serving.” Read the Gospels and ask, “How does my life look like the loving and serving life of Jesus?” In short: recognize God in the world and be the tangible presence of Christ. It doesn’t always look like prayer, but it certainly is a way of acknowledging God in the great things and the small things.

Bible Reading:

Read Psalm 8

⁴¹ E.A. Livingstone, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 221-222.

⁴² Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms For Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Open Door, 1991), 71-72.

Prayer

“Monday” topics

Take a prayer walk in which you acknowledge and praise God through your experience of His creation. Or, simply serve someone today in an act of charity.

Journal**Tuesday, September 20**

Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

List some things which speak to you from today’s Bible readings:

Are you comfortable with God examining and evaluating you?

Have you ever welcomed this examination?

Reflection: The Prayer of Examen

The Prayer of Examen – as described by Richard Foster – has two parts:

The first is an *examen of consciousness* through which we discover how God has been present to us through out the day and how we have responded to his loving presence. The second aspect is an *examen of conscience* in which we uncover those areas that need cleansing, purifying, and healing.⁴³

The examen of consciousness is a prayerful activity of remembering events. During this part of the prayer we search for signs of God’s presence in the interactions we recently experienced. Again, Foster is helpful for making this clear.

In the examen of consciousness we prayerfully reflect on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of our days to see how God has been at work among us and how we responded. We consider, for example, whether the boisterous neighbor of last night was more than just a rude interruption of a quiet evening. Maybe, just maybe, he was the voice of God urging us to be attentive to the pain and loneliness of those around us.⁴⁴

⁴³ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 27-28.

During this examination we will begin to see less provocation in the world and more of the signals given by the world that God is desperately needed. We examine things of which we were conscious and ask for Spirit-directed enlightenment.

In the examen of conscience we are again seeking the Spirit's revelation, but what we are searching for is an examination of things within us of which we may *not* be aware. We must ask God to search our hearts because it is all too human to live in self-deception. We must invite God to be completely honest with us and must be willing to not raise the defenses. Additionally, we must not go too far in this prayer by "beating ourselves up" over our failures. Quite simply the goal of this prayer is healing. We cannot confess and begin to grow until we become aware.

Both types of prayers require that we trust and are open to the Spirit's direction. Surrender and allow God to lead you in examination and evaluation. It may be that God greatly wants to speak to you in this way, but you have constantly set the agenda and resisted reflection.

Prayer

"Tuesday" topics.

Journal

Wednesday, September 21

Bible Reading:

James 4:6-12; 1 Peter 5:5-7

Who opposes us when we are proud? _____

Why is grace so important? _____

Reflection: Prayer of Humility

Going through a trial, I found that I could not get over anger and a debilitating hurt. It seemed that no matter how much I reasoned it out, talked with friends, prayed, or even accepted blame, the situation remained broken. At one point in the turmoil I began to turn my focus toward God in a bad way. I started (in essence) letting God know that He does a really bad job of keeping me safe. I let Him know that the righteous (me of course) get hurt and the wicked can act with impunity and no fear of earthly consequences. I have to say "earthly" because I really do believe that God sorts this out in eternity, but in my immediate pain, that knowledge seldom satisfies.

⁴⁴ Foster, 28.

I looked over my life and began to justify the ways in which I have sought to take care of myself. I even said to God, “No one has ever taken care of me and that is why I have had to learn to take care of myself!” What followed was a real “Job” moment.

I began to hear some questions in my mind which were simple at first. “So, you fed and clothed yourself when you were young? You provided for yourself a home growing up? You always took care of yourself when you were sick, even driving yourself back and forth to the doctor? I can only assume you changed your own diapers? You always protected yourself by your mighty power from injury and harm?” On and on it went.

Sometimes when the situation will not ease up it can be traced back to pride. We don’t mean to go there, but in numerous ways we begin to say, “What was done to me was wrong and I will have justice!” Sounds like we are saying, “Move over God! You are botching this whole thing!” Or in the midst of turmoil we say, “I am going to have to take care of myself because no one else will.” Really throughout the scope of our lives, how much “taking care of ourselves” have we really done? You and I have little we can boast of which was not given directly or indirectly through others.

We must live by grace – a grace which supports us, not because we can demand something, but because God is willing to forgive and cleanse us. He doesn’t stop there. Furthermore, He likes to exalt us by His hand and He hates to see us humiliated (cast low) because of pride.

The prayer of humility is no technique. For me it is the rehearsal of the words of 1 Peter 5 and a reminder that pride obstructs grace. We cannot afford to be cut-off from grace.

Prayer

“Wednesday” topics.

Journal

Thursday, September 22

Bible Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

In Jesus’ three challenges, what is the common thread in all of His responses to the devil?

Reflection: Praying Scripture

No one could ever say for sure, but I believe that Jesus did not feel defiant and powerful in that time of temptation. What I mean is that I do not believe He was itching for a fight, had been studying, and was now ready to let old Satan have it with a series of

perfectly delivered Scriptures. I believe the Word had been His meditation His entire earthly life and during a time of need He began to speak it. Whether He felt goose bumps or not while quoting Scripture is immaterial. He utilized the Word in His time of need and we, too, can recite Scripture in our prayers to address whatever it is which we need.

Everyone will compile over a lifetime a different list of memorized Scriptures. Additionally, that list should continue to grow. Our prayers can be greatly aided by praying through Scripture and here are just a few categories and references for consideration.

- Pray for forgiveness using 1 John 1:9
- Pray for protection using Psalm 91:11
- Pray regarding fear and a lack of confidence: 2 Timothy 1:7
- Pray confidently for anything which you need: Luke 11:9
- Pray as a reminder that God is doing a work: Philippians 1:6
- Pray as a reminder that we must humble ourselves: 1 Peter 5:6
- Pray as a reminder that God’s Word will work freedom in our lives: John 8:32
- Pray as a reminder that we have the resources of “the mind of Christ” and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 2:16 & 1 Corinthians 3:16
- Pray as a reminder that when we “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23), the nine *Fruit of the Spirit* will follow.
- Pray as a reminder that each day requires a deliberate laying aside of our wants and fleshly urges: 1 Corinthians 15:31
- Pray to unleash thanksgiving and praise: Psalm 50:14 & Psalm 100:4
- Pray Scripture as a means of entering worship: Romans 12:1
- Pray as a reminder that we don’t look at things in the natural, but in the Spiritual: 2 Corinthians 5:7
- Pray as a reminder that we are precious to God: Psalm 139
- Pray and meditate over a Proverb as you want to grow in wisdom
- _____
- _____

Prayer: “Thursday” topics

Journal

Friday, September 23

Bible Reading: 1 Kings 19

How would you describe Elijah in this chapter?

In your own words, what did God do for Elijah on Mount Sinai which restored the prophet?

Describe what a day of rest and restoration would look like for you?

Reflection: Sabbath Rest

Clearly the Bible advocates (or mandates) that humankind set aside time for rest. God in the act of creation rested on the seventh day and declared it holy. God's self-imposed rest could not have been based on His own personal level of exhaustion or burnout. Rather, God establishes the pattern to be followed by everyone hereafter. Just as God elected to rest, so we too must elect to rest. However, it is hard for us to make that decision consistently because we are so harried by matters we presume are of great importance. Let us continue with the biblical record.

We all know that the fourth of the Ten Commandments states the requirement for the Sabbath to be observed. This is coming alongside of injunctions to not steal or kill, so clearly rest should be considered important and planned for obediently. Here is an interesting aside: Which of the other commandments do we routinely brush off and treat as optional?

Besides the formal injunction to set aside time for rest we have the witness of 1 Kings 18-19 and Elijah's burnout. After defeating the prophets of Baal the prophet seems to be emotionally and physically spent. What ensues in that passage is not a rebuke from God, but rather a time of rest and nurture touching upon the prophet's deep needs. He sleeps and he eats while everything else must wait.

In the Gospels, Jesus is often depicted as withdrawing to "desolate places" and spending time in prayer. Luke in particular describes how Jesus spends vital time before major points of the ministry in concentrated prayer. And though prayer is not synonymous with a Sabbath rest, I believe that the withdrawing from the regular activities and demands of life to pray is the clear point of pausing one day out of seven. We are to stop succumbing to the urgent and surrender our lives to the presence of God!

Have you set aside the time for rest and prayer?

Prayer:

"Friday" topics

Journal

Saturday, September 24**Bible Reading:**

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You might practice *Lectio Divina*, *Ignatian*, *Augustinian*, or *Franciscan Prayer* and record your experience.

Journal

Sunday, September 25**Bible Reading:**

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You choose. Take note of anything which impressed you in prayer today.

Journal

APPENDIX L

Week 6 Devotion Materials

Monday, September 26

Reflection: Thomistic Prayer

Thomas Aquinas is considered one of the greatest and most influential theologians of the church. Born around 1225 and trained at the abbey of Monte Casino from the age of 5, Thomas Aquinas' life was devoted to church work, particularly teaching and writing. Though not lacking in deep spirituality, Aquinas' legacy is highly intellectual and philosophical.⁴⁵

The Thomistic method of prayer as described in *Prayer and Temperament: Different Forms for Different Personality Types* emphasizes “orderly progression of thought from cause to effect.”⁴⁶ People who like solving problems and engage the world through logic and reason excel at this method. In this regard Thomistic Prayer will not seem like true prayer for some personality types because it resembles the intellectual work of study. However, this rational method is invaluable at times for meditating on issues needing spiritual growth. There is a self-discipline and openness within this method which combines the searching of our minds and the searching of the Spirit to yield fruitful results.

We turn to Michael and Norrisey's words for the description:

In this type of prayer, one takes a virtue or fault or theological truth and “walks around it”, studying it from every possible angle. To enable one to get a full grasp on the topic chosen for Thomistic Prayer, it is recommended that one *uses* the seven auxiliary questions: WHAT, WHY, HOW, WHO, WHERE, WHEN, WITH WHAT HELPS and applies each of them to the topic selected. For example, one might take the virtue of faith as the subject for one's meditation. One would then ask the following questions: What do we mean by faith? What is entailed in the practice of faith? What are the reasons to justify the pursuit of faith? Why should

⁴⁵ E.A. Livingstone, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 577-578.

⁴⁶ Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms For Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Open Door, 1991), 79.

I have faith? What is the value of it? How might I practice faith? Who are some of the people in the Bible and in history who are examples of the practice of faith?⁴⁷

The ideal is to produce an orderly encounter with the Truth which leads to transformation. What we grasp in Thomistic Prayer must then become the impetus for a change of behavior or direction. Without changes to one's life, this method would be a mental exercise. By keeping our close relationship with God (as the One who is guiding this process) we can expect great things and can avoid the pitfalls.

Bible Reading:

Read Mark 8:34-38 and approach the idea of “taking up your cross” in Thomistic Prayer.

Prayer

“Monday” topics

Journal

Tuesday, September 27

Bible Reading: Ephesians 6:18-20

In what does Paul want us to “stay alert”? _____

What does it mean to intercede for all the saints? _____

Do you pray for boldness? _____

Reflection: Intercessory Prayer

Intercession is a form of petition, but is distinctive in that it is focused in the needs of others. Whether we are lifting up individuals with personal concerns, or praying for something affecting many people, like a movement of God's Spirit on the mission fields of Africa, we as Christians are certainly supposed to intercede. In intercession we are motivated by love and compassion to consciously set aside our own pressing concerns and make requests for others. Intercession requires strong faith and maturity – but you don't have to consider yourself strong in faith, nor wait to become mature before you start. The issue with intercessory prayer is that its very practice will move you quickly into a deeper spirituality.

Consider how in the process of interceding on behalf of the physical, emotional, or spiritual needs of another, you exercise your faith and grow in dependence upon God. You place yourself in a position of expectation and by this action you are strengthening

⁴⁷ Michael and Norrissey, 83.

your faith. The more things you believe God for, the closer you will get to Him and the stronger and more experienced you will become in the ways of faith.

The issue of maturity also arises in intercession because as we learn to carve out time in prayer which is not directed toward our own needs, the more we become Christ-like and capable of greater service to others. Not only will we begin to “grow up” as we practice intercession, we will help to heal the brokenness and estrangement we can sometimes experience with fellow Christians, or with people who are positioned effectively as enemies. I believe that the admonishment in Romans 12:18, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (NAS) should at the very least be a call for us to intercede on behalf of others. What a privilege it is to be co-laborers with God as we offer redemption, peace, and healing in all of our relationships. Redemption is the work of God and He is pleased when we join Him by interceding.

I mainly want to leave you with one overarching impression today: Intercession is a proactive means of healing that which is broken and envisioning on earth that which is already the case in heaven.

Prayer

“Tuesday” topics.

Journal

Wednesday, September 28

Bible Reading: Luke 22:39-46

In a few words what is so powerful about this brief story?

Reflection: Prayer of Relinquishment, Part 1

It is often helpful in reading the gospel accounts to consider material before and after a narrative section or parable. Interestingly, if we look a few verses before the account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane we read that the disciples were discussing (with enthusiasm I am sure) their imminent success and places of honor and authority. You see, Jesus was about to do the great things they knew He was capable of and naturally they were going to start reaping the benefits of their association with Israel’s Messiah. Jesus quickly corrects the premature and immature celebration of these disciples.

You have to give kudos to eleven of the disciples for recognizing God’s work in the world in the form of Jesus. Lots of people did not get to that crucial place of

recognition – Judas and the religious establishment comes to mind. However quickly or assuredly the first disciples and even us today come to recognize who Jesus is, we all seem (excuse me) a little “daft” when it comes to recognizing God’s ways in the world. God’s way is the way of humility and relinquishment. This is illustrated vividly in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In the garden, Jesus is not just biding his time waiting to complete the divine plan for the redemption of humankind. Jesus is struggling. His flesh, His emotions, and even his mind are crying out that this is too hard. He knows He will suffer mightily before it is all over. He knows that at every juncture in the next several hours He will have to choose submission instead of something else: self-will. If He chooses not to suffer, He of all people has powerful options. He could call upon angels (that’s what He said); I imagine He could have silenced or humiliated His opponents all the way to Golgotha just so that everyone knew who was really in charge; or I imagine He could have anesthetized His own pain or disassociated in some supernatural way so that the pain was not truly felt. In that case the cross would have been endured as simply a matter of “Let’s just get painlessly through the dying part and then wait for the Sunday resurrection.” Jesus had options – that is if He believed that the highest goal in life is taking care of your own needs and wants.

The scene at the Garden of Gethsemane illustrates perhaps the highest place of Christian discipleship and the highest place of prayer. When Jesus prayed in agony those familiar words, “Not my will, but Your will be done” He offered all people for all time a picture of humankind’s great struggle – the struggle of setting aside every natural inclination for self-will and self-preservation. This sacrifice is motivated by love and can only happen through a Holy Spirit aided prayer of relinquishment.

Prayer

“Wednesday” topics.

Journal

Thursday, September 29

Bible Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Verse 5 says, “Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus...” (HCSB). If attitude is a choice, what attitude(s) have you been choosing lately?

Reflection: Prayer of Relinquishment, Part 2 (Self-Emptying)

I owe Richard Foster a debt for introducing me to an insightful teaching about the “Prayer of Relinquishment” in his book: *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*. I

believe that any journey in Christian discipleship – particularly a journey in prayer such as the one you have been on – must come to this highest pinnacle: relinquishment of self-will. Yesterday’s study served to hold up the ultimate model of relinquishment with the depiction of Jesus in the garden. Today we have more illumination on Jesus’ surrender as we read in Philippians 2 what has been often titled “the Kenosis/Kenotic Passage” – from a Greek word meaning “self-emptying.” Jesus knew intimately about the choice facing humankind in any spiritual challenge, which is a choice of fighting for self-will, or for the kind of humility that stands aside, defers, and “empties” one’s self.

Self-emptying is the high calling of a Christian disciple. When God calls a missionary to leave family and friends to preach the gospel far from home, there must be a self-emptying. When God calls an individual to stay in an unsatisfying situation at work (at least for some time longer), then the struggle is precisely one of self-emptying. When we must forgive and even actively seek to restore broken relationship when it would be more appropriate that the other party work on the forgiveness and brokenness, that too is an issue of self-emptying.

Relinquishing our wills will always be a struggle, and will always feel (I am not trying to be dramatic) like death. But this surrender is not the defeat of death – it is the beginning of something that only God can do. We will conclude for today with Foster’s words:

The Prayer of Relinquishment is a bona fide letting go, but it is a release with hope. We have no fatalist resignation. We are buoyed up by a confident trust in the character of God. Even when all we see are the tangled threads on the backside of life’s tapestry, we know that God is good and is out to do us good always. That gives us hope to believe that we are the winners, regardless of what we are being called upon to relinquish. God is inviting us deeper in and higher up. There is training in righteousness, transforming power, new joys, deeper intimacy.⁴⁸

Prayer: “Thursday” topics

Journal

Friday, September 30

Bible Reading: Galatians 2:20

Reflection: The Prayer of Relinquishment, Part 3 – The Crucifixion of the Will

⁴⁸Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 52.

We have been preparing for this moment for two days as we have discussed Jesus' model of relinquishing His own urge toward self-will. The application for each of us has been made, but it is worth one more very direct attempt at saying, "This is not just about Jesus' struggles, this is about *our* deepest struggles." We cannot be "Sunday morning Christians" who naively believe that we can have the assurances of faith and promises of eternity without the struggle of dying to self. But dying is not easily embraced and many times we will have to doggedly seek the death of our own self-will. Foster makes crucifying the will a hopeful prospect when he says:

Do you know what a great freedom this crucifixion of the will is...? It means freedom from the self-sins: self-sufficiency, self-pity, self-absorption, self-abuse, self-aggrandizement, self-castigation, self-deception, self-exaltation, self-depreciation, self-indulgence, self-hatred, and a host of others just like them. It means freedom from the everlasting burden of always having to get our own way. It means freedom to care for others, to genuinely put their needs first, to give joyfully and freely.⁴⁹

It is so hard to let go sometimes, but honestly it is hard to live your life under the tyrant of your own selfishness. You and I must recognize the terrible oppression we choose to live under when we spurn God's will. Additionally in the midst of this hard teaching, Foster writes necessary encouragement about the prayer of relinquishment.

Please remember, we are dealing with the crucifixion of the will, not the obliteration of the will. Crucifixion always has resurrection tied to it. God is not destroying the will but transforming it so that over a process of time and experience we can freely will what God wills. In the crucifixion of the will we are enabled to let go of our tightfisted hold on life and follow our best prayers.⁵⁰

It is all too easy to feel that our every need, want, or impulse is being denied and we are required to submit our very personhood. Understand that God made you with unique attributes that He will never ask you to deny. Surrendering our wills is a choice to defer to God's greater good. And far from squashing our personhood, being in that mature place in our relationship with God where we can surrender, will make us fully alive as the people He created us to be.

In the struggles remember this encouragement: God Himself joins us so readily in our prayers as we relinquish control and claim the new life He has promised. He is faithful.

⁴⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 54.

⁵⁰ Foster, 54-55.

Prayer:

Practice a full *Lectio Divina* with Galatians 2:20 and engage “Friday” topics

Journal**Saturday, October 1****Bible Reading:**

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You might practice *Lectio Divina*, *Ignatian*, *Augustinian*, *Franciscan Prayer*, or *Thomistic Prayer* and record your experience.

Journal

Sunday, October 2**Bible Reading:**

You choose. Take note of Scripture passages read below.

Reflection:

Prayer

You choose. Take note of anything which impressed you in prayer today.

Journal

APPENDIX M

Agenda for Capstone Meeting

CBC Prayer Group Sunday, October 2, 2011

Myers-Briggs Testing and Review

Discussion of personality type and its usefulness

Synthesis

- The retreat idea
- The need for synthesis
- Reaction to: Simple prayer, Petition, Thanksgiving, Confession, Intercession, Ignatian, Augustinian, Franciscan, Thomistic, Prayer of Relinquishment, Prayer of Humility, Lectio Divina, Prayer of Examen, Corporate prayers, Prayer & Fasting, etc.

What can you take away from a study of prayer which can become a part of your life?

Where should the church go with prayer now?

Group Prayer Time

Meal

APPENDIX N

Survey of Prayer and Devotional Practice (Post-experiment)

Survey of Prayer and Devotional Practice #2

The following survey is nearly identical to the one you took six weeks ago. Again, please give an honest assessment of your experience with prayer. Select the best description on a scale of 1-5 and write it in the blank provided.

Not at All / Never	A Little / Sometimes	Neutral	Mostly / Most of the Time	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Private Prayer

- _____ 1. I prefer to pray alone.
- _____ 2. For my private prayers I prefer a consistent time and place.
- _____ 3. When praying in private, I speak my prayer out loud.
- _____ 4. My prayer language in private is informal.
- _____ 5. In private prayer I spend time in silence and listening.
- _____ 6. I utilize the Bible during private devotional and prayer times.
- _____ 7. I utilize other printed, digital, or audio/visual resources during private devotional and prayer times.
- _____ 8. I am refreshed by private prayer more than public prayer.

Public Prayer

- _____ 9. I willingly pray in public.

- _____ 10. I listen to people carefully when they pray in public.
- _____ 11. I pray with others in order to seek direction in important decisions
- _____ 12. I initiate prayer with individuals or groups.
- _____ 13. I wish for more prayer during worship services.
- _____ 14. I wish for more opportunities to pray in public.

When Do I Pray?

- _____ 15. I pray daily.
- _____ 16. I pray spontaneously.
- _____ 17. I typically have bedtime prayers.
- _____ 18. I typically pray before meals.
- _____ 19. I pray either inwardly or out loud during the average Sunday worship service.
- _____ 20. I pray either inwardly or out loud in prayer at the Wednesday evening service.

How Do I Pray?

- _____ 21. I like to pray with a certain posture, e.g., kneeling, or in a certain place.
- _____ 22. I spend time listening to God in prayer.
- _____ 23. I write down people's names and prayer concerns.
- _____ 24. I fast and pray.
- _____ 25. I enjoy written prayers.
- _____ 26. I will express my emotions fully to God in prayer, even if I am angry with Him.
- _____ 27. I meditate on Scripture when praying.

_____ 28. I address my prayers to God the Father.

_____ 29. I address my prayers to Jesus.

_____ 30. I address my prayers to the Holy Spirit.

For What Do I Pray?

_____ 31. I pray for forgiveness.

_____ 32. I pray for the needs of others.

_____ 33. I will ask for my personal desires in prayer.

_____ 34. I pray for my community.

_____ 35. I pray from my church.

_____ 36. I pray for my government and leaders.

_____ 37. I pray for needs around the world.

_____ 38. I pray for Christian missions.

Beliefs About Prayer

_____ 39. I feel that there is power in prayer.

_____ 40. I feel that prayer is one of the most important things a church can do.

_____ 41. I would rather be doing something active to meet a need than spend time praying.

_____ 42. I feel that God does not hear prayers when there is sin in my life.

_____ 43. I feel that prayers of clergy, deacons, or “saintly” people are more likely to be answered.

Self-assessment of Prayer and Spiritual Life

_____ 44. I often yearn for times of prayer.

- _____ 45. People often share their prayer concerns with me knowing I will pray over them.
- _____ 46. I find that my mind wanders in prayer.
- _____ 47. I am generally happy with my prayer life.
- _____ 48. I feel uplifted after pausing for times of prayer.
- _____ 49. I feel generally “at peace” in my life at this time.
- _____ 50. I feel close to God and His will.

Please rate on a scale of 1-3 your comprehension of the following terms:

No Comprehension	Vague Comprehension or Unsure	Basic Comprehension or Better
1	2	3

- _____ 1. Intercessory prayer
- _____ 2. Prayers of petition / supplication
- _____ 3. Prayers of confession
- _____ 4. Contemplative prayer
- _____ 5. Prayers of thanksgiving / adoration
- _____ 6. Prayers of invocation
- _____ 7. Pastoral prayer
- _____ 8. Prayer of Examen
- _____ 9. *Lectio Divina*
- _____ 10. Thomistic prayer
- _____ 11. Augustinian prayer
- _____ 12. Franciscan prayer

_____ 13. Ignatian prayer

Please answer the following by checking the appropriate response:

4. On average, I spend the following amount of time in prayer each day:
- _____ Less than 5 minutes
- _____ 5-15 minutes
- _____ 15-30 minutes
- _____ 30-60 minutes
- _____ More than 1 hour
5. I feel that I should ideally spend _____ in prayer each day:
- _____ 5-15 minutes
- _____ 15-30 minutes
- _____ 30-60 minutes
- _____ More than 1 hour
6. My daily prayers are best characterized as:
- _____ Focused prayers at set times, e.g., morning prayer time
- _____ Focused prayers when situations arise
- _____ Spontaneous thoughts asking for God's presence or assistance
- _____ An open-ended conversation with God having no specific beginning or ending

Please describe your preferences when engaging in prayer.

4. The ideal place (or setting) for me to focus on prayer is _____
- _____.
5. My favorite posture (e.g., sitting, lying, walking, etc.) of prayer is _____
- _____.
6. The best time of day for me to pray is _____
- _____.

If you were participating in the guided study of prayer over the last 6 week period, i.e. you were receiving weekly packets of daily readings and exercises, please elect the best description on a scale of 1-5 and write it in the blank provided. (If you did not participate in one of the prayer study groups, go on to the "Comments" section.)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- _____ 1. Using the prayer study materials enhanced my prayer life.
- _____ 2. I kept pace with the daily readings and exercises.
- _____ 3. I skipped some of the daily readings and exercises. If so, estimate how many: _
- _____ 4. I sometimes did more than one reading per day to catch-up.
- _____ 5. If you were not in the prayer group that met weekly, do you feel that interacting with a small group would have improved your experience over the last 6 weeks?

Please offer any additional thoughts or reflections below.

Comments: _____

I, _____, understand that the above information is to be utilized in a Doctor of Ministry project through Garden-Webb University and directed by Pastor Randy McDaniel. I understand that any part of this survey's data may be included in the research and subsequent publication. I understand that use of my survey data will be anonymous and do herein give my consent for this information to be used per the stipulations above.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX O

Select Question Retest of the Post-experiment Survey

For purpose of anonymity, the following questions require retesting. Your answers from the fall have been made available for your consideration in a second document. Please complete this form. For your privacy, please submit this form by email to Tammy (cbcflloyd@swva.net) or by sliding them under Tammy's door.

Select the best description on a scale of 1-5 and write it in the blank provided.

Not at All / Never	A Little / Sometimes	Neutral	Mostly / Most of the Time	Always
1	2	3	4	5

_____ 5. In private prayer I spend time in silence and listening.

_____ 9. I willingly pray in public.

_____ 12. I initiate prayer with individuals or groups.

_____ 15. I pray daily.

_____ 22. I spend time listening to God in prayer.

_____ 23. I write down people's names and prayer concerns.

_____ 31. I pray for forgiveness.

_____ 32. I pray for the needs of others.

_____ 33. I will ask for my personal desires in prayer.

_____ 34. I pray for my community.

_____ 35. I pray from my church.

_____ 36. I pray for my government and leaders.

_____ 11. Augustinian prayer

_____ 12. Franciscan prayer

_____ 13. Ignatian prayer

Please answer the following by checking the appropriate response:

1. On average, I spend the following amount of time in prayer each day:

_____ Less than 5 minutes

_____ 5-15 minutes

_____ 15-30 minutes

_____ 30-60 minutes

_____ More than 1 hour

APPENDIX P

Cover Letter for the Post-experiment Retest

Dear Friends,

It has been nearly 4 months since the conclusion of our prayer study. I was (and am) very appreciative of your participation in that project. I believe many people were benefited spiritually. I was certainly benefited in that way, as well as assisted in my doctoral studies.

The main reason for my writing is regarding the upcoming submission date for all of the project data and analysis (Feb. 1). It was brought to my attention by my adviser at Gardner-Webb University that some improvement needed to occur with regards to the Survey #2 you received in October. The post prayer study survey should have been administered anonymously to insure the highest quality of responses. To correct this problem a retest of select questions has been proposed which will maintain anonymity and greatly improve the data.

I would be very grateful if you could offer me your timely help by filling out the survey form (Retest) provided and returning it to Tammy. Detailed instructions are at the top of the survey. Additionally, I have included in a separate document your answers from the same questions from the fall. Again, instructions are at the top of the form: "Retest."

Thanks you so much for your assistance in this and for so many more things.

Randy McDaniel

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