

**WALKING THE
ANCIENT PATHS**

**“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.”**

Matthew 6:9-13

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“...flee to the Church, and be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord's Scriptures. For the Church has been planted as a garden in this world”

Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, c. 180 A.D.



SESSION ONE
THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

For two thousand years, people all over the globe have chosen to put their common faith in the gospel as the central rhythm of their week. Why do Christians gather? How can we collectively rediscover the value and purpose of coming together as God's people in sacred time and space?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Not including the church gathering, are there other reasons you gather every week with one or more other people? How do you benefit from such gatherings?
2. If you have been at your church a long time, what are specific parts of every worship service?
3. The Greek word translated church (ekklesia) could refer to any public gathering or assembly. What do you think are the marks of Christian worship gatherings?
4. Read Deuteronomy 31:9-13. Consider how these words from the Old Testament for the people of Israel can lead to our ideas of the gathering of believers. How are our methods and goals similar? How are they different?

5. Have you ever heard someone say that being in “nature” is their church or that being “home with family” is their church? Do you resonate with these ideas? Explain. What do you think is missing in these environments?
6. Read Hebrews 10:24-25. What are some of the current reasons for “neglecting to meet together”? What in these verses explains our motivation to do so?
7. The Epistles (Romans - Jude) in the New Testament contain several “one another” statements, some positive and some negative. Find them by using a concordance or online Bible search tool like BibleStudyTools.com. How might these play out in the gathering of believers?
8. How are your church attendance habits? What keeps you from the gathering of believers? What would need to change for you to become more consistent?



APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

Churches have different rhythms and different liturgies, but at the center of them all must be Jesus Himself. It is His word, His table, and His people worshipping. It can be easy to enjoy a gathering of your favorite people or a gathering in a place that gives you joy, but if these meetings are missing the basic components above, is it “church”? No. We can’t give up the gathering of the saints. It is an ancient practice that is essential to the faith. Have you neglected it? For what reasons?

Look at the table of contents again, and think through whether these practices could happen without the church gathering. What could you give up in order to join your local body of believers consistently? How can you make it happen?

“Happy is our sacrament of water...”

Tertullian, On Baptism, c. A.D.



SESSION TWO
BAPTISM

INTRODUCTION

Every Christian participates in a kind of mysterious initiation. It sounds weird, but the mystery is baptism. This first step of obedience is an embodiment of our faith in the gospel, and it tells a story to the watching world.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Write down your top five values — your ordering principles. Now consider how people see you spend your time and money, and consider what you think about most often. Do your observable values match your stated values?
2. If you have been baptized, discuss your experience of baptism. How old were you? What was your driving motivation to be baptized?
3. How would you describe the purpose of baptism?
4. Read Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 9:9-10 and Acts 2:36-39. How do these different passages fit together despite being from different contexts? How does baptism fit into our Christian faith?

5. Read Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12. What story does baptism tell considering Paul's words?
6. Baptism is a public declaration that is intended to happen once in a Christian's life. What are the obstacles that might stop someone from embodying this act of obedience?
7. Someone tells you he is a medical doctor, and when you ask him what schools he attended the response is, "I didn't go to school." What would you think? If someone claims to be a Christian, but has not been baptized, how should the church respond? Would you be willing to take Peter's approach in Acts 2:38?



APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

Baptism publicly declares where your sole hope and allegiance lies. The ancient church even created back-up options in case water wasn't available (like using milk instead). It was that important. It is the moment a person steps into the narrative laid out by the life, death and resurrection of our King. We embody His story and announce to the world that it is our story.

Have you taken this first step of obedience in the Christian faith? Do you know someone who has been avoiding it? Have you asked them why?

“This is my body, which is given for you.”

Gospel of Luke 22:19

“For with a great gravity is the work of judging carried on among us, as befits those who feel assured that they are in the sight of God; and you have the most notable example of judgment to come when any one has sinned so grievously as to require his severance from us in prayer, in the congregation and in all sacred intercourse.”

Tertullian, Apology, 197 A.D.



SESSION THREE

COMMUNION/ CHURCH DISCIPLINE

INTRODUCTION

The Protestant tradition rightly emphasizes the preaching of God's Word as a central aspect of weekly gatherings. Unfortunately this can often lead to a de-valuing of other key elements of Christian worship, including the celebration of Communion. Although an underemphasis on Communion has been normalized in many churches, we should ask: how are we to understand and value the practice that Jesus taught us?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Looking around at the state of the world and even your own situation, how would you describe the state of things? Good? Bad? Are things the way they should be? What fuels you while living in this environment?
2. What does communion point to, and what are the implications? Explain.
3. Read Luke 22:19-20, Matthew 26:26-28, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. How would you say participation in communion helps us to live our lives when circumstances are good and when they are difficult?
4. How do you think communion is connected to baptism?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 and 11:27-30. Is communion for everyone who attends church? Are there reasons one should not take communion? Explain.
6. Read Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. There are very few specific commands about church discipline, but what seems clear from these texts?
7. Have you ever done anything that you did not want church leadership to know? Do you think they would have taken any action?
8. Have you ever done anything that made you question whether you should take communion on Sunday? If you are willing, tell the story.
9. How would you feel if your church leadership withheld communion from you due to your behavior? Explain. If you did not care, what might this mean about your view of communion?



APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

A Holy moment every week. That moment you take the bread and the cup with your family and friends. You consider your week, knowing that you have been invited to a King's table, a table at which you would not belong apart from Christ. The beauty is that no matter how challenging or full of failures your week has been, you are given the grace of this moment that not only looks back to the Passover celebrated differently by the Messiah, but looks forward to the hope promised. Here our weekly practice reminds us of our baptism, the story we now inhabit. What a heavenly reminder!

Do you ever minimize this moment? Do you let it come and go without cherishing Jesus? Do you ever reduce it to an unimportant symbol? May it never be so.

“Therefore all the day long speak of the praise of God, to wit, in prosperity and in adversity; in prosperity, as though in the day time; in adversity, as though in the night time: all the day long nevertheless speak of the praise of God, so that you may not have sung to no purpose, “I will bless God at every time, always the praise of Him is in my mouth.”

Augustine of Hippo, Exposition of Psalm 71, c. 400 A.D.

“It was for this very reason that these harmonious hymns of psalms were invented for us, so that even children of age or those who are still immature in morals might merely sing them, but in reality they would train their souls.”

Basil of Caesarea, Discourse on Psalm 1, c. 370 A.D.



SESSION FOUR

WORSHIP THROUGH SONG

INTRODUCTION

Music has a powerful influence. We all have had a moment where we know a song has met us in a deeper place than simply our ears.

Imagine what the influence of song would have been in a time when God's people had a limited song list, limited instruments, and every song was intended to put the object of your worship at the center.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you experienced a moment when music and song had a significant emotional impact on you? If so, describe it.
2. Do you use music to change your mood, or do you select music based upon your mood? Explain.
3. There are several songs written in scripture to commemorate an event. Examples are Exodus 15:1-18 and Deuteronomy 32:1-43 which are both songs from Moses. What do they have in common? Why seal these moments with song?
4. If you have read the Psalms, consider that it was the corporate songbook of Israel. We read songs. Read Psalm 30 as an example. What was the purpose of these songs to ancient people?

5. What are the lyrics of one of your favorite worship songs? Now, compare these lyrics to one of your favorite non-worship songs. What is the motivation and focus of the different songs? Would you sing the non-worship song with others? Why/why not? In what environment?
6. Do you think worship is meant to be embodied? If so, how? What are your barriers to participation in song at church?
7. Read Ephesians 5:15-20. How does song fit into the Christian life from Paul's perspective?
8. Read Colossians 3:15-17. How does song fit into Paul's thinking? What are the other spiritual practices that accompany song here?
9. After discussing song and how it functions, can you think of songs or artists that you listen to that maybe point you in the wrong direction? Do you have any favorite songs that you would not want your children or young relatives listening to? Explain.



APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

Your body is an instrument. It is a resonant chamber that is designed to join with others to speak of the majesties of our God. You may think that your voice is not good or that there are so many others who sound better, but imagine a symphony. All of the different instruments come together with a part that is designed to overlay with the others. They play different parts and they sound very different. In fact, some don't sound great as solo instruments. But, when the parts come together, it is beautiful.

Your worship is beautiful before King Jesus. No matter how discordant. No matter how flat. Sing to your King.

“But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.”

The Didache, c. 100 A.D.



SESSION FIVE

CONFESSiON

INTRODUCTION

Protestants rightly affirm that Jesus is our one true High Priest and that we can go to him to receive forgiveness of sins. But the Scriptures speak a lot about confessing your sins to others. Let's explore what we might be missing by not having regular rhythms of confession in our lives.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is admitting our sins so difficult? Why is repentance (turning away from sinful patterns) even more difficult?
2. What is the difference between confession and repentance? How should they be related?
3. Read Proverbs 28:13. Do you think these two statements are true? Have you experienced either side of it? Explain.
4. Read 1 John 1:5-10. How does John describe sin? Using his analogies, what would be a couple of ways of describing confession?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-12. How can grief work along side of repentance?

6. Read James 5:13-20. What other ancient practice is connected directly to confession in this passage? Why do you think such a tight connection exists?
7. Are you close enough to your church family that someone in it, whether leader or friend, knows your story and your sin patterns enough to challenge you and press you towards obedience?
8. One of the Greek words for “confess” used in the New Testament is also used in the sense of confessing Jesus as King. Have you ever considered that every confession (with repentance) done rightly is actually a confession that Jesus is King?
9. Why might confession be good for your local church?



APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

Are you scared of telling others the truth about you? You aren't alone. So, we keep all of our sinful secrets to ourselves, those that others have imposed on us, and those of our own rebellious hearts. And we become undone by them. Like gangrene stopping the lifeblood from our appendages, we are slowly eaten away. Brothers and sisters, confession is good for the soul and it is good for the church. Sanctification of the group and individual elevates the idea of the bride being beautiful. We can all contribute to this effort.

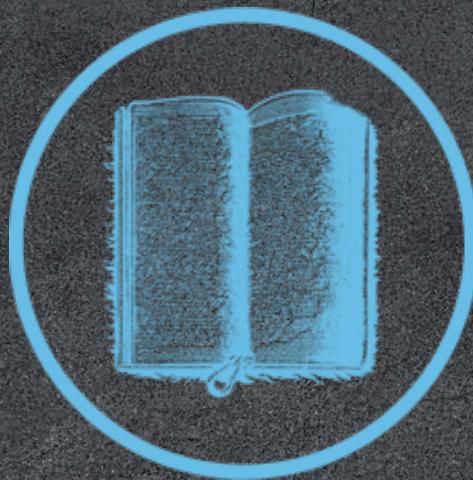
Have you met with a friend or a pastor to release some of this unhelpful cargo? Make a plan to do so.

“... so the perfect apprehension of the law and the prophets is an elementary discipline for the perfect apprehension of the Gospel, and all the meaning in the words and deeds of Christ.”

John Chrysostom,
Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, c. 386 A.D.

“Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them.”

Clement of Rome, First Epistle of Clement, c. 95 A.D.



SESSION SIX

READING SCRIPTURE

INTRODUCTION

Imagine living in ancient Ephesus where the temple of Artemis stands at the center of the city, or instead imagine ancient Athens, where you look to the heights and see the Parthenon, the temple of Athena and the symbol of Greek power. Every human lives in a time in which there are competing stories, and if we are not careful we will start to live out the wrong ones.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How would the images all around an ancient person living in a pagan city influence their understanding of life and purpose?
2. Like these ancient sites, what are the people, places, and things that influence how you interpret where you fit into today's world? What are the messages that are loudest, and where are they coming from?
3. Why would Christians read through the whole story of the Bible repeatedly?
4. What are the cultural stories that have the most influence on your life and risk overshadowing the gospel and the story of Scripture? Other than only reading the Bible, what practices can help you remember and return to the power of the gospel?

5. Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17. These are words to Paul's child in the faith, Timothy. What "Scripture" is the Apostle Paul speaking of in his statement? What is the goal of his words to Timothy and what should we take from it?
6. Read Luke 24:13-27. When Luke refers to "Moses and all the Prophets," to what is he referring? What is the resurrected Jesus doing here and how might it help us think about how the gospel reinforces Scripture?
7. What are your biggest obstacles to reading the Bible? What might be a good strategy to get past these obstacles?
8. If the culture around us is, at best, neutral toward Christianity, how can you use the truth of Scripture to combat the other stories that compete for our allegiance?



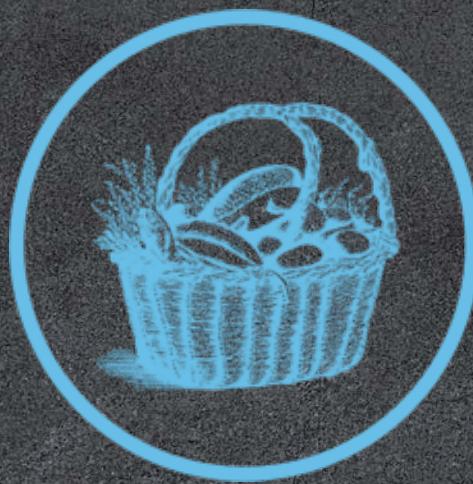
APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

The Bible is the Christian's anchor to reality. It is intended to capture our imagination about what is really going on. It recounts things of the past, but it also seems to inform us about how things are and how they are supposed to be. Pitfalls. Dangers. Real enemies. This ancient text calls its reader into the great story of all reality and to the One who ultimately writes it. We couldn't imagine a lawyer who never consults case law or a mechanic who never stays up-to-date on the latest service bulletins for our automobile. How can we expect to hold fast to the Anchor if we don't have a habit of reading it?

Pick a Bible reading plan for the year, and stick to it. Here are some possibilities: <https://bibleproject.com/reading-plans>.

“Prayer, fasting, and tears are the resources of an honest debtor, and much more abundant than if one from the price of his estate offered money without faith.”

Ambrose, Concerning Repentance, c. 394 A.D.



SESSION SEVEN

FASTING

INTRODUCTION

In the Western world, fasting is no longer known as a Christian practice. Nowadays more people fast for health than for worship. If fasting has a spiritual goal, what should it be? If one would refuse food to improve one's health, is Christian fasting just a different version of the same thing?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are situations that would typically make you not want to eat?
2. Have you ever fasted in order to get something from God? Explain.
3. Read 2 Samuel 12:21-23. Why does King David fast and what ended his fast?
4. Read 1 Kings 21:21-29. Why does Ahab fast? What is the result?

5. In Jonah 3, the people of Nineveh fasted and repented because of Jonah's message. The result? God relented. If you know anything about Nineveh and the Assyrians, why is this event incredible?
6. Do you ever mourn over your own uncontrolled passions? Do you mourn because of the sin of those around you? Explain.
7. Read Matthew 6:16-18. While fasting seems primarily voluntary in the Old Testament, what would make such a practice popular enough for Jesus to speak these words? What does Jesus presuppose about fasting? What does he prescribe when fasting? Does he give reasons for fasting?
8. A first century document about the fundamentals of living as Christians called the Didache speaks of fasting twice per week. Does this seem excessive? Why would this ancient practice be built into the rhythm of the Christian life? What is the participant to learn from it?



APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

Very often in the Bible, fasting is associated with mourning something that has happened or a tragedy that may be coming.

Reading Jesus' words about fasting and how they come very close to his words on prayer, it seems there could be a connection. But why fast? Is there an area of your life where you are not aligned with God's will? Do you feel the weight of sin and failure? Does it make you mourn? Well, maybe giving up that which gives you life (i.e. food) to remind you where every heartbeat and every breath comes from is a good idea.

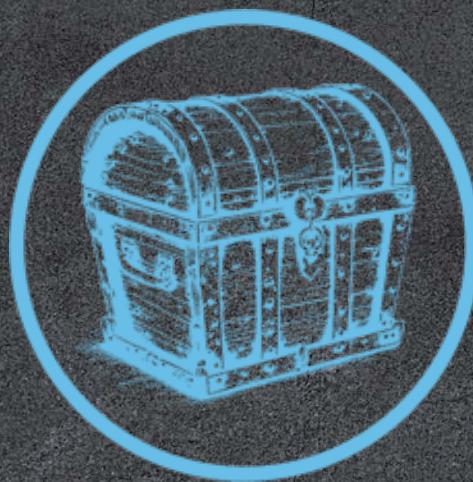
Is there something you see happening around you that is not the way it is supposed to be in light of God's Word? Oh, how many indeed! Maybe it's time to set aside meals consistently, not because you are bargaining with God to fix it, but because you trust Him and His promises that He is making everything right, including sanctifying you by teaching you to say "no" to yourself!

“We who formerly treasured money and possessions more than anything else now hand over everything we have to a treasury for all and share it with everyone who needs it. We who formerly hated and murdered one another now live together and share the same table. We pray for our enemies and try to win those who hate us.”

Justin Martyr, First Apology, 155 A.D.

“But if one is able in the midst of wealth to turn from its power, and to entertain moderate sentiments, and to exercise self-command, and to seek God alone, and to breathe God and walk with God, such a poor man submits to the commandments, being free, unsubdued, free of disease, unwounded by wealth.”

Clement of Alexandria,
Who is the Rich Man That Shall be Saved?, c. 203 A.D.



SESSION EIGHT

GIVING

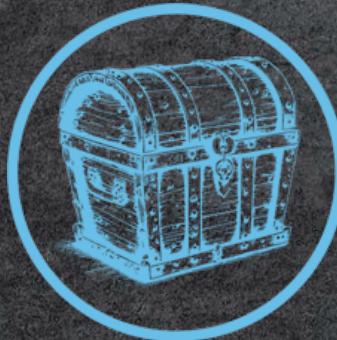
INTRODUCTION

Trying to live in New York City or in San Francisco can be difficult because it is so expensive to live in these places. That said, even those who might be classified under the poverty level in those cities rarely compare to the poor in the Majority World. Water in every home, heating and cooling, and standard refrigeration are luxuries the rest of the world does not necessarily have. All we have are gifts; but how should we use them for good?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe true generosity?
2. Read Luke 12:13-21 and Luke 19:1-10. How should we reconcile stories about wealth such as these?
3. What is the most generous thing someone has done for you? Did you feel the desire to repay them in some way? Is that how Christian charity should work? Explain.
4. Read Matthew 6:19-21 and 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Compare Jesus' warning with Paul's warning. What are they saying about treasure and the desire for riches?

5. Read Romans 12:9-21. From this list of Christian virtues, what stands out as related to generosity? Which elements of generosity are hardest for you?
6. In 2 Corinthians 9:5-11, Paul is teaching about generosity and its impact beyond the mere financial. What else is happening when a posture of generosity is observed?
7. Read Acts 4:32-35. What do you think enables people to show this kind of care for each other and to entrust leadership with such gifts?
8. The church has always needed direct support from God's people, just as it was for the Israelites and the Tabernacle and Temple. What are the major obstacles to giving directly to the local church? How might our culture of individualism and materialism influence these obstacles?



APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

If you think of someone as “stingy” or “miserly,” what does that mean?

They don’t share? They have more than they need and horde it all? What percentage should they share that would prompt you to remove these negative labels? It’s hard to come up with an answer, right? You don’t know all the variables. Now, turn the same idea toward yourself, where you DO know all the variables. What are the arguments you use to justify when something is worthy of your generosity? As an example, what reasons have you given for your level of generosity to the local church? It seems they have enough? They won’t manage it as well as you? There are reasons that the Old Testament Law contained laws to support the operation of the Temple and the Levites and Priests.

While the New Testament church may not have such hard and fast rules, where does the local church fit into your financial planning?

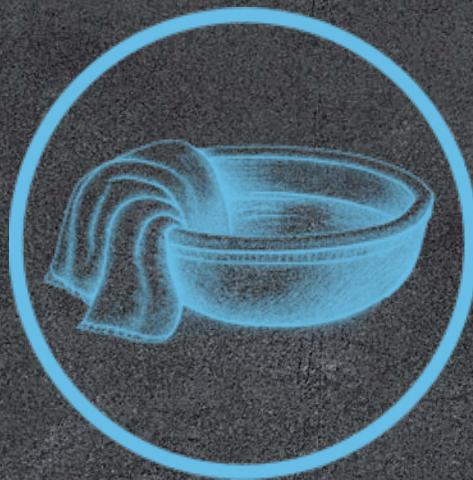
How about generosity to others in need whom you know won’t be able to return the favor? At the heart of the gospel message is this: humanity, who were created good, have rebelled against their Creator, yet He still chases them down to offer them salvation. This gift required the greatest generosity—His One and Only Son.

“For, as much as God is in want of nothing, so much does man stand in need of fellowship with God. For this is the glory of man, to continue and remain permanently in God's service.”

Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, c. 180 A.D.

“Labour together with one another; strive in company together; run together; suffer together; sleep together; and awake together, as the stewards, and associates, and servants of God.”

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to Polycarp, c. 100 A.D.



SESSION NINE
**SERVICE /
PRIESTHOOD**

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes you may hear someone who leaves a worship service say, “I really felt fed today,” or maybe they are seeking a new church because their current church is not “feeding” them. This is not an altogether wrong sentiment, but if this is one’s prevailing view of church, then they may be putting church on par with movie theaters and shopping malls.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Levites and priests in the Old Testament were responsible for the tabernacle service. This included the elements of worship at the tabernacle but it also included setup, tear down, and movement of the whole thing. Was this other hard work still service? Is one service greater than the other? Discuss.
2. Read 1 Corinthians 10:24-33. Though this is specifically about food offered to idols, what is the general principle that is established? What is the difference between “people pleasing” and what is described in verse 33?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Romans 12:4-8. How does the analogy of the body that Paul uses so often help to illustrate the importance of serving the church family?

4. List those skills you feel God has given you. (NOTE: Don't limit this to what you might find on a spiritual gifts assessment. For example, if you are good with spreadsheets, that counts). Now, how many of these skills do you share with others when you don't receive something in return?
5. Do you offer any of these skills to your local church? If not, why not? What does "participate" mean to you in the context of church?
6. Consider the "priesthood of all believers" often derived from 1 Peter 2:5, 9. How does the idea of church authority fit together with priesthood of all believers? Are they contradictory? Explain.
7. Do you have difficulty submitting to a local church or the leadership of a church? What do you think are the key reasons? How might this influence your desire to serve?



APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

Serving the church does not benefit God. He needs nothing from us. He is contingent on nothing, dependent upon nothing. So, who does “service” benefit? Obviously, it benefits the object of the service, but without doubt, the servant is blessed as well. When correctly directed, the servant who pours out his or her skill for the benefit of others builds the discipline and self-sacrificial posture of Christ.

Have you ever thought that you may be withholding your gifts from the intended recipient, the Church, Christ’s bride? If you read Hebrews 13:7, 17 and 1 Peter 5:1-5, you can see that church leaders are intended to give their lives to the Church as well. Though they are imperfect, do you respect them and honor their gifts? How can you find ways to honor the Bride through serving her?

“Nor ought we, beloved brethren, only to observe and understand that we should call Him Father who is in heaven; but we add to it, and say our Father, that is, the Father of those who believe— of those who, being sanctified by Him, and restored by the nativity of spiritual grace, have begun to be sons of God.”

Cyprian of Carthage, Treatise 4, c. 250 A.D.

“But how great is the Lord's indulgence! How great His condescension and plenteousness of goodness towards us, seeing that He has wished us to pray in the sight of God in such a way as to call God Father, and to call ourselves sons of God, even as Christ is the Son of God, -a name which none of us would dare to venture on in prayer, unless He Himself had allowed us thus to pray! We ought then, beloved brethren, to remember and to know, that when we call God Father, we ought to act as God's children;”

Cyprian of Carthage, Treatise 4, c. 250 A.D.



SESSION TEN

THE LORD'S PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus is described as praying often, but there is a place where he provides a specific prayer to his disciples. It is instructive, but do we consider its majestic content and benefit from its grace each and every day?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Matthew 6:9-13. After reading the prayer, what are some things you could state that the prayer presupposes (things that are assumed as reality)?
2. When you pray, do you have a standard place and posture? Describe it. How much of your prayer life would be visibly obvious if someone walked in on you?
3. Give a quick analysis of your prayer life and estimate the percentage of time you request things for you and your family, the percentage you request things for others, and the percentage you give thanks for things that you already have. What do you think of your results? Where is there area for growth?
4. A common thematic verse in many psalms is, “Oh give thanks to the LORD; for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.” Are you a thankful person? How would you give evidence for it?

5. What is the opposite of thankfulness, and what do you think causes it?

6. Read Philippians 2:14-16. How does the Apostle Paul say Christians should be different than those around them?

7. When you think of “Father”, is it a positive or negative thought process? Explain. How do you think this can affect your approach toward God?

8. Read John 17, which is sometimes referred to as the High Priestly Prayer. While the Lord’s Prayer is something we can benefit from every day, what does this prayer in John tells us about Jesus’ prayer?

9. Consider the other sessions in this series. How do you think the Lord’s Prayer works together with each of the other elements?



APPLICATION: WALKING THE PATH

Rite and ritual are often frowned upon in our culture. Memorizing an ancient prayer can seem unauthentic or unoriginal; we are taught to be original and authentic to ourselves. What does this actually mean? It is as if looking deep within ourselves could find that nugget of truth, the spark of divine that gives meaning and purpose. Here is the problem. If we are being honest, looking inside for this kind of affirmation is plagued with problems because we are more apt to find muddy waters and gaping holes. The Lord's Prayer is a way through these challenges. It reminds us of a good Father who desires to call us "sons" and "daughters."

Do you know this prayer? Do you use it as Jesus commanded? Maybe memorization is not so bad after all. Though it may seem counterintuitive, you won't be sorry if you look outside yourself for meaning, purpose and ultimate goodness.

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