



POWERFUL

Prayer

STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

The Bible says a great deal about prayer.

Jesus said, *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened"* (Matthew 7:7, 8).

Can it really be that simple?

Jesus said, *"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it"* (John 14:12, 13).

Is God really like a divine vending machine that will give us whatever we ask in a prayer that ends with "...in Jesus name"?

The Apostle Paul instructs us: *"Pray continually..."* (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and *"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people..."* (1 Timothy 2:1).

Do we pray first and foremost? Or is it last and fast?

James, the apostle and brother of Jesus, reminds us: *"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective"* (James 5:16).

Is praying powerfully and effectively a sign of a righteous life?

The Bible also says a great deal about being filled with the Spirit.

Jesus said, *"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit....But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:5, 8).

Do we see this kind of power and bold witness today?

The Apostle Paul writes: *"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 5:18-20).

The Bible says a great deal about prayer and being filled with the Spirit—but how can we pray
POWERFUL PRAYERS?

During this series, we'll be walking through four occurrences in the Bible when people prayed bold and effective prayers—POWERFUL PRAYERS—that changed their present reality and gave them a future with hope. As we walk through these stories of people who discovered the secret of POWERFUL PRAYER, let us pray God will use this season to help us pray together and alone.

WEEK ONE – MAY 7

SOLOMON—TO BE GIVEN WISDOM BEYOND OURSELVES

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READ: 1 Kings 3:4-14

THEME: When Solomon prayed selflessly, God granted his wants and needs.

As we come to look at, think about, and get in touch with what our text teaches us about Solomon and powerful prayer, we'll find several truths to help us move to a deeper and more powerful prayer life.

OVERVIEWS TO LEAD INTO GROUP DISCUSSION:

POWERFUL PRAYERS ARE OFTEN CONNECTED TO WORSHIP (3:4)

God is more likely to hear and respond to prayers that come from those who regularly know and worship Him. Gibeon was a town of Levites (priests), and it was the location of the tabernacle. At the onset of King Solomon's reigns, he makes a sacrifice of worship proportionate to his possessions and position. Worship places us in the position to be able to hear and respond to God's voice.

- Do you think we enter worship times with an anticipation of hearing God speak to us?
- Do you think we see worship as part of our prayer life?
- What role does worship play in your prayer life?

GOD WHO IS GOOD WANTS TO GIVE HIS CHILDREN THE DESIRES OF OUR HEARTS (3:5)

As Solomon slept after making the sacrifices and worshipping the Lord, God visited him in a dream and offered to give him anything he asked. This scene foreshadows some of the teaching of Jesus—who told His disciples, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13). Or when Jesus tells His followers, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7, 8).

- Do you think we understand the power of prayer?

POWERFUL PRAYERS ARE OFTEN BORN OUT OF HUMILITY AND NEED (3:6-8)

Solomon understands he's in way over his head. He's sitting on a throne he didn't earn. It was given to him because God had been so good to his father, David. He realizes he's young and inexperienced—he doesn't know what he doesn't know—and he's in charge of a nation whose needs he can't possibly comprehend. He has nowhere near the life experience needed to lead himself—let alone an entire nation.

- Do you think we understand the importance of humility in our prayers?

ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED AND RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO ASK FOR WHAT YOU WANT (3:9)

God gives Solomon an offer filled with limitless possibilities. Solomon could ask for wealth—for power—for a long life—to remove his enemies. Bottom line, Solomon could've asked God for anything. But he doesn't ask for whatever his young, immature self might want. Instead, he showed incredible self-awareness in asking for what he needs. He needs wisdom to rule justly and rightly. One of the secrets of praying in the name of Jesus is not using them as magic words that simply end the prayer, but to pray in alignment with His will and not our own. We need to understand, more often than not, God's will is rooted in meeting needs that benefit others rather than a laundry list of wants that serve us.

- What's the difference between praying for what we need and what we want? Why is it important for us to understand the difference?

GOD SEES THE HEART AND ANSWERS ACCORDINGLY (3:10-14)

God saw Solomon's selfless heart and gave him not only what he needed but also riches and honor—presumably so he would use them to meet the needs of others, as well. He received all he asked for—as well as all he didn't ask. God also told Solomon if he followed Him and obeyed His statutes and commandments all his days, God would give him a long life. As a result, the kingdom of Israel would have its largest territory, richest treasury, and most expansive reputation under Solomon. God did exceedingly, abundantly more than he could have ever asked or imagined. We're reminded, once the heart is right, everything else follows.

- How often do we squander what God has blessed us with because our hearts aren't in the right place—primarily because we get caught up in chasing after our wants?

ONE WORD OF CAUTION—DON'T FORGET THE SOURCE OF WISDOM (Ecclesiastes 1)

Within days of his prayer being answered, Solomon exhibits incredible wisdom by settling a dispute between two women over the custody of a child. The country would flourish, and Solomon would become the wealthiest and most popular man of his time—all the benefit of God's favor. But over time, Solomon forgot from where his wisdom, wealth, and popularity came. He entered hundreds of political marriages, chased pleasure with abandon, and began to experience the emptiness that comes from chasing pleasure alone. His God-given wisdom is captured in the Old Testament book of Proverbs—but his futile quest for pleasure is revealed in the vanity he calls life in the book of Ecclesiastes. And by the time we get to his third book in the Old Testament, we find Solomon's unquenched thirst for pleasure leaves him hollow inside and yearning for the perfect woman to fulfill his dreams. He also started treating the ten tribes to the north differently than he treated Judah and Benjamin—and as soon as he died, the kingdom split into north and south.

In the end, the powerful prayer Solomon prayed asking for the wisdom he needed was squandered because he became distracted by chasing wants. The lesson for us is when we pray selflessly, God has room to trust us with more than we could ask or imagine.

RESPOND:

- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?
- What next steps do you need to take?
- How can the group help you?
- Who do you need to tell in order to keep you accountable?

WEEK TWO – MAY 14

HANNAH—BE GRANTED THE DESIRE OF OUR HEARTS

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READ: 1 Samuel 1:9-17

THEME: Today's text teaches us several truths about powerful prayer from a time in the life of Hannah—the mother of the prophet Samuel. When Hannah prayed without reservation, God gave her the desire of her heart.

As we come to look at, think about, and get in touch with what our text teaches us about Hannah and powerful prayer, we'll find several truths that will help us move to a deeper and more powerful prayer life.

OVERVIEWS TO LEAD INTO GROUP DISCUSSION:

DON'T STOP WORSHIPING AND TENDING YOUR SOUL (1:9)

Sometimes, we allow our anger over life circumstances to be lived out in ways that are destructive to our souls—as well as our relationship with God. Hannah resisted the temptation to stay at home when Elkanah and the rest of the clan travelled to Shiloh—and what unfolds in this text happens in front of the chief priest Eli. As painful as it was, Hannah continued to show up and engage in the habits that tended her soul. The important lesson that we need to learn is when we disengage from God, it doesn't hurt God—but rather it hurts us. God would much rather us yell at Him than ignore Him.

- Have you ever allowed a life situation that had you frustrated, angry, bitter, or the like to disrupt your worship of God and the tending of your soul?
- Do you think we understand that, when we disengage from God, it hurts us?

BE HONEST AND ALLOW GOD TO HEAR WHAT'S ON YOUR HEART (1:10)

Hannah wept and prayed with a bitter soul. Years of frustration. Years of ridicule. Years of feeling like she didn't matter. Years of feeling like God had forgotten and forsaken her came flooding out of her heart in prayer. Too often we fail to understand that we'll never find healing until we're honest about our feeling—and we share them with God. He already knows what's on our hearts. We simply need to be open and honest with Him and ourselves. Hannah was probably terrified to let God see and hear exactly how she felt—but from what follows, God didn't punish her for her bitterness. In fact, God would always prefer an honest confession than a sugar-coated deception in our prayers.

- What makes it difficult for us to allow God to know what's on our hearts?

SURRENDER TO GOD WHAT MATTERS TO YOU THE MOST (1:11)

Hannah was so desperate she was willing to give God the things she wanted the most. She pledged that if God would give her a son, she would raise him for the purpose of giving him back to God as a priest who worked in the Tabernacle for his entire life. She's pledging to raise him with the sole purpose of knowing, loving, and serving God. As an aside, how different would we parent if we vowed to raise our children to know, love, and serve God before anyone or anything else? What stands out is how Hannah's desperation drives her willingness to be open-handed with what she desires most. We tend to pray selfish, manipulative prayers about what we want—rather than seeing how God might use what we want for what He needs. Eli had not properly raised his sons, and God would eventually use Samuel—a prophet and priest who knew, loved, and served God before anyone or anything else—to replace the corruption of Eli's house. But first, Hannah needed to be willing to give God what mattered to her the most.

- How much different would our lives be if we lived with the kind of surrender that gives God everything we pray about and for with an open hand?

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT IS NOT UNDERSTOOD BY THOSE WHO DON'T HAVE THE SPIRIT (1:12-16)

Hannah's so wrapped up in emptying and pouring out her bitter heart to God that she's not paying any attention to who's watching. She's deep in prayer—under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. How do we know? She'd never be able to make and keep that kind of vow if it wasn't for the Holy Spirit. Eli assumes she's drunk! The same was true on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit descended on the disciples—everyone assumed they were drunk. The Apostle Peter assures the crowd it was the fulfilled promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit they were seeing. Even yet today, unspiritual people will sometime think we're crazy when we pray and act in the Spirit. Hannah assures Eli what he's watching is a heart being cleansed of anguish and grief as she cries out to God. Hannah's testimony struck a nerve with Eli—it's been a while, but he remembers there were times when God moved in people's lives like this.

- Have you ever had an experience where someone misunderstood you as you were following the Spirit's lead?
- How would you explain yourself to them?

ALLOW THE POURING OUT OF YOUR HEART TO DO ITS WORK (1:17, 18)

Eli extends a word of grace to Hannah and asks that God grant the desire of her heart. She responds by praying that Eli's prayer would be fulfilled. We read that she ate something and that her face was no longer downcast. All of the anguish, distress, and bitterness in her heart was now gone—and her soul was clear and at peace.

- How many opportunities do we miss in our lives because we don't pour our hearts out to God and allow the Spirit to do its work?

GOD GAVE HANNAH THE DESIRE OF HER PURE HEART (1:19, 20)

This story is about so much more than giving a child to a barren woman. For Hannah, being willing to give what she desired most (a son) was the kind of surrender God needed to be able to use her to bring Samuel into the world. Her pure heart was willing to raise her son to know, love, and serve God for the rest of his life. This series of events wasn't just about relieving a mother's grief—it was about raising up a leader for God's people.

- How willing do you think we are to respond to God as Hannah did when He answered her prayer? Do we follow through with our promises as she did—or do we soon forget?

BE TRUSTWORTHY ENOUGH TO BE TRUSTED BY GOD (1:24-28)

After she weaned Samuel, Hannah took him to Shiloh as she made a sacrifice to God for His faithfulness and gave her son to Eli saying, “Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord. And he worshiped the Lord there” (1:26-28). Samuel went to work for Eli in the Tabernacle—and while there, he would hear the voice of God for the first time in a long time. Samuel would become the greatest prophet and priest in the Old Testament. He would become the restorer of the Tabernacle—the anointer of Saul and David—a mouthpiece for God—and conscience for kings. And it started with this powerful prayer—desperately prayed from the honest heart of a bitter woman.

We learn from Hannah that, when we pray in the Spirit and live with an open hand, it gives God room to do exceedingly, abundantly more than we can ask or imagine.

RESPOND:

- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?
- What next steps do you need to take?
- How can the group help you?
- Who do you need to tell in order to keep you accountable?

WEEK THREE – MAY 21

HEZEKIAH—BE DELIVERED FROM OUR ENEMIES

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READ: 2 Kings 19:14-19

THEME: When King Hezekiah prayed in desperation, God acted decisively to deliver Judah from Assyria.

As we come to look at, think about, and get in touch with what our text teaches us about Hezekiah and powerful prayer, we'll find several truths that'll help us move to a deeper and more powerful prayer life.

OVERVIEWS TO LEAD INTO GROUP DISCUSSION:

HEZEKIAH SOUGHT THE WILL OF GOD (19:2-4)

This is one of the traits that made Hezekiah a good king. He sent for the prophet Isaiah—told him what was happening—and asked him to inquire of the Lord about what they should do. Hezekiah understood his role—and when he needed to hear a word from the Lord, he didn't have a Bible to which to turn. Hezekiah called the prophet/priest Isaiah to inquire of God and speak God's word into the situation.

- How much different would our lives be if we always inquired of the Lord before making a decision—especially one of significant consequence?

REMEMBER GOD IS ON YOUR SIDE (19:5-7)

Just as God had allowed Sennacherib to defeat Israel and its capital of Samaria because of its sin, God was about to judge the king of Assyria because he had blasphemed the Lord. He was a dead man walking, and he didn't even know it. Because Hezekiah was a good king and God had promised to protect His people, God was going to protect them from this threat. Remember God is always on the side of the righteous. When we find ourselves being pressed in on every side, it's important to remember God sees the beginning from the end and will turn every circumstance together for good as we love Him and live in obedience to His purpose.

- When times get tough—when facing difficult situations—what helps you to remember God's on your side?

OUR ENEMY WILL OFTEN DOUBLE-DOWN ON THEIR THREAT (19:8-13)

When Sennacherib learns the king of Egypt is marshaling troops to fight against him, he sends another threatening message reciting all the kings and kingdoms he's vanquished in his path. Sennacherib blasphemes Yahweh again by saying no gods can stand against him. He's using a typical, school-yard bully tactic—loud, obnoxious, arrogant, and blindly confident.

- Are there times when we do the same—seeking to display our own strength rather than demonstrating our trust is in the Lord and His strength?

HONESTLY TELL GOD WHAT'S HAPPENING AND ASK GOD FOR HELP (19:14-19)

What an amazing prayer. As soon as he gets the letter, Hezekiah goes directly into the Temple and spreads the hate-filled, threatening pages out before the Lord. The prayer that follows has three movements: 1) Hezekiah calls on the God of the universe to hear and see what Sennacherib has done—he's insulted the Living God! He tells it like it is. Here's the thing—this wasn't a secret to God. But sometimes when we speak words aloud, it helps us to recognize a situation is far beyond our capacity to manage. 2) Hezekiah acknowledges the truth of recent history. Assyria was the world power that has laid waste to nations and destroyed their false gods of wood and stone in the fire. 3) Hezekiah appeals to God—his God—the God of the Universe—to deliver them so that the world may know He alone is God. The prayer was not to deliver Judah for Judah's sake, but to act to show God's glory to the world.

- What lessons can we learn from Hezekiah here? What are some key takeaways for you?

LISTEN FOR GOD'S ANSWER AND CLAIM GOD'S PROMISES (19:20-34)

God sends Isaiah to prophesy against Sennacherib (19:21-28), give advice to Hezekiah about how to recover from the damage the Assyrians have done (19:29-31), and pronounce judgment against Sennacherib and deliverance for Jerusalem (19:32-34). This scene is a reminder the long arch of history always sides with God's people—and God will fight for those who are faithful.

REMEMBER TO LET GOD FIGHT FOR YOU (19:35-37)

We can fret and fear—plot and plan—and try to take matters into our own hands. Or we can pray and trust—listen and learn—and allow God to do what only God can do. An important lesson in this story is God's thoughts are better than our thoughts—His ways are better than our ways—and He doesn't slumber or sleep when it comes to keeping His promises. In the end, Sennacherib was dead, the Assyrians would soon be defeated, and Judah was preserved—at least for another day and long enough to allow the root of faithfulness introduced by Hezekiah to be planted so a remnant would later remain out of whom would come the Messiah—Jesus.

We learn that, when we come to the end of ourselves and pray in utter dependence upon God, it gives God room to act and deliver us from evil.

RESPOND:

- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?
- What next steps do you need to take?
- How can the group help you?
- Who do you need to tell in order to keep you accountable?

WEEK FOUR – MAY 28

PENTECOST—BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT AND POWER

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READ: Acts 1:4-14; 2:1-11, 36-41

THEME: We've spent the first three weeks of POWERFUL PRAYER preparing and pointing toward the celebration of Pentecost—the time when, ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven, God poured His Spirit out on all flesh. Jesus, who was limited by time and space in His body, was now gone—and the Spirit of Jesus came in power on Pentecost. The Spirit awakens us to our need for a Savior. The Spirit convicts us of our sin. The Spirit moves to make our hearts ready for conversion and salvation.

When we're saved, the Apostle Paul teaches us the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives inside of us—and we're to be continually filled with the Spirit. The Spirit continues His work inside of us by convicting us of sin, sanctifying our lives by delivering us from sin's control, and empowering us to live the life of Jesus here in preparation for the day we'll see Jesus face to face. The coming of the Spirit was an answer to prayer—and God still fills His people with His Spirit when we pray.

As we come to look at, think about, and get in touch with what our text teaches us about Pentecost and powerful prayer, we'll find several truths that'll help us move to a deeper and more powerful prayer life.

OVERVIEWS TO LEAD INTO GROUP DISCUSSION:

WAIT FOR THE PROMISED GIFT (1:4, 5)

Jesus commanded His disciples to stay in Jerusalem—to pray and wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit which He promised would come and guide them into all truth. Jesus had promised the Spirit in John 14 and was giving them instructions to wait for the Spirit before “Going and making disciples...” Jesus was leaving the earth so the Holy Spirit could come—but the disciples needed to actively wait and pray. The same holds true for us today as we need to wait and pray for the Spirit to empower and equip us.

- Do you think we wait patiently for the Spirit's lead—or do we too often try to manipulate or run ahead?

DON'T GET DISTRACTED (1:6, 7)

These verses make it sound as though the disciples weren't listening or didn't understand as they ask Jesus when He was going to restore the Kingdom of Israel. They were missing the fact that what Jesus was establishing was so much bigger and more consequential than an earthly kingdom. He was launching the Kingdom of God upon the earth. He didn't want them to get distracted by petty or nonessential disputes. If we're not careful, this can happen to us as we think in terms of our time—our church—our wants and desires—while God is acting on an entirely different plane.

- What are some of the distractions that tend to sidetrack us?
- Can you think of a time when this happened to you?

SEEK AND OPERATE IN GOD'S POWER (1:8)

The Greek word for "power" is "dunamis"—the root word for dynamite. This implies the power the Spirit gives us is explosive in its capacity. It makes our witness powerful and effective. We need to understand our witness isn't simply limited to our backyard—but rather it entails our community, our city, country, and the world. Evidence of the Spirit is the power found in the prayers and witness of God's people.

- Do you think we seek to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit—or do we too often seek to go in our own power?
- Why is it important to operate in God's power?

WORK UNTIL JESUS COMES (1:9-11)

As Jesus ascends into heaven, the disciples watch as He leaves their sight. Scripture tells us as they do two angels remind them, "Don't just stand there! Get moving. Do what Jesus said. There's work to do until He returns in the same way!" If we're not careful, we can get so consumed with looking for Jesus' return we fail to do what He's instructed us to do. We can become so heavenly minded that we're of no earthly good. We're called to lean into prayer, seek the Spirit's empowerment and leading, and do what God calls and equips us to do.

- Can you think of some ways that we get caught up in "spiritual busyness" that we fail to engage in the work God calls us to do?

STAY CONNECTED AND IN PRAYER WITH OTHER FOLLOWERS (1:12-14)

The disciples returned to the upper room where they'd been staying—and they constantly devoted themselves to prayer. They stayed connected and prayed with each other. They would wait and pray for ten days. During that time, they also selected a replacement for Judas—but the main emphasis was waiting and praying.

- Are we connected with other followers of Jesus?
- Do we wait and pray for the Spirit's direction and power?
- What might it look like for us to wait and pray today?

BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (2:1-4)

Peter would later tell the crowds outside the upper room that this was the fulfillment of what the prophet Joel promised—when God would pour His Spirit out on all flesh. This is also the fulfillment of all Jesus promised in John 14 and Acts 1:8. This is the kind of experience Paul told the Ephesians they needed: "to be filled, over and over again, with the Holy Spirit." We receive the Spirit of the risen and living Jesus the moment we invite Him into our hearts—as He forgives us and gives us His assurance we are His and He is ours. We need to understand we need to be filled continually because we leak. We have this treasure in jars of clay, and we need to be filled over and over again.

Just like the disciples and all the dear saints who have gone before us, we need to be willing to wait and pray—to seek until we find—to knock until it is opened to us. WAITING—PRAYING—ASKING—SEEKING—and KNOCKING will be the key to finding.

- Do you think that we are a people who understand the importance of waiting – asking – seeking – and knocking? What tends to get in the way?

YOU HAVE TO TELL SOMEONE (2:5-11)

Jerusalem was packed with people from all over the Roman world—Jews and God-fearers who'd made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. As the disciples poured out into the streets, they were talking about Jesus in different languages—meaning the pilgrims could hear the good news and respond. This in turn helped to spread Christianity to the outskirts of the Roman Empire within two months of the resurrection. The infilling of the Holy Spirit was too good not to share, and they told anyone and everyone what Jesus had done for them. One evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit is our witness.

- Have you told someone what Jesus has done for you?
- **NOTE:** This could be a time to practice sharing your faith story and what Jesus has done for you.

THE SPIRIT ALWAYS BEARS FRUIT (2:36-41) The crowd thought they were drunk, but Peter assured them this was the day about which the prophet Joel prophesied. Peter then preached the first sermon of the Christian church. The result is captured in these verses at the end of Acts chapter 2: “three thousand were added to their number that day” (2:41). It became clear that the person of Jesus—limited by His physical body—was now gone. But in His place is the unlimited and pulsating Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit filled His followers and was everywhere at once—convicting, converting, and consecrating new believers—and the era of the SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH began. When the Church—the Body of Christ—is filled with the Spirit and tells others about what Jesus has done for them, the Spirit always bears fruit.

- Are you willing to commit yourself to wait and pray so the power of the Holy Spirit will fill you? Our church? And change our community?

RESPOND:

- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?
- What next steps do you need to take?
- How can the group help you?
- Who do you need to tell in order to keep you accountable?