



**COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH**

Teach Me How to Pray

Daily Scripture Readings for

February 21 - March 20

WEEK 1: BRING GLORY TO GOD

Monday, February 21 - John 17:1-5

“Teach us how to pray.” These are the words the disciples utter to Jesus in Luke’s Gospel which prompts Jesus to pray the Lord’s Prayer in Luke 11:2-4. We consistently use this prayer and its companion in Matthew 6:9-13 as a model of how to pray. And we should. However, Jesus prayed more than just this one prayer. Over the next four weeks, we will be reading and meditating on different prayers and teachings on prayer that Jesus gives during his ministry. The focus of the Sunday Morning Sermons will come from John 17: Jesus’ prayer before He is arrested.

The emphasis of the first five verses of this prayer is glory. Jesus is asking God to glorify Him so that Jesus can glorify God. Glory is one of those words in church that we use but rarely define. Exalt would be a good synonym. Acknowledgement of elevated status could be a description of glory. So what we have is Jesus asking God to give Jesus elevated status. Jesus is asking for God to make Jesus’ prestige apparent, so that in turn Jesus could make the power and majesty of God known to the world.

What could that mean for us? Should we pray as Jesus prayed in these verses? Do we pray to be made known to the world, or at least a little part of it, so that we can make our God known to the world? Consider these questions today. Contemplate as you read over these verses several times. How can you pray like Jesus did? Write that prayer down and let it be a prayer you visit every day this week.

Tuesday, February 22 - Matthew 5:13-16

I don’t like asking for directions. It’s a genetic deficiency of my people (men). So when I travel to a new place, whether I’m in an airport or driving or walking around, I rely on signs. A destination that has good signage means I don’t have to ask for directions and this makes me a happy person. In my

experience, the best signage is at DFW airport. Typically, just by looking around, I can see signs for the bathroom, way to baggage claim, gates, security, food, ticket counter, and anything else you need when you fly. I have discovered that DFW airport is a very efficient and helpful airport in getting people to where they need to be. (The worst for me was LaGuardia airport in New York, but I'll save that for another day.)

Signs get people to where they need to be. As Christians, we should be signs to people who are lost pointing them in the direction of where they need to be. We are to be a light, Matthew 5:16 says, so that others may give glory to God. As Christians, we have a responsibility to God and a responsibility to others. Our responsibility to God is to bring him glory. Our responsibility to others is to tell them and show them God's prestige and excellence. In one action, we fulfill both responsibilities. Do good in the world so that God receives the credit. Do good so others worship God.

Too often, however, we hide the light that God has given us. We keep our Christian identities to ourselves and do not bring glory to God. Nobody can learn about the excellence of God because we don't share with them. The world doesn't see God because his people keep the light to themselves.

I know you are already singing, so take some time at the end of this devotion to sing *This Little Light of Mine*. Are you going to let your light shine today and bring glory to God?

Wednesday, February 23 - James 1:1-18

We will begin a study of James this morning. James is a practical book which focuses on moral instruction to Christians throughout the world. Much of the passage we read today focuses on the hardship which most people face during their life. What does James tell us to do in these moments of affliction? Consider them a joy because this hardship will lead to a deeper faith!

I don't know about you, but I have a hard time with that. I get the premise of why this passage says this, but I have a hard time putting this passage into practice. In essence, James is saying that hardship is going to come in your life and you have two choices of how to deal with it. Will you deal with it in depression or will you deal with it in joy? What God's word is asking us to do is difficult!

That's why the passage continues to say if you lack wisdom, ask God. If you are struggling to accept the trial as God wants you to, ask God to help you. Ask God to help you choose joy in your difficulty. I must admit to you that on the day that I am writing this devotional entry, I am struggling with lots of difficulty. Too many people I know and love are sick. My obligations are pulling me in every direction. I feel like this is a time of trial. I had been letting it get me down, but now I am moving forward. I am asking God for wisdom. I am trusting that He will guide me and help me. And because I have the Lord on my side, I have joy. God's got the whole world in His hands. God is in control. Praise be to God!

Thursday, February 24 - Matthew 6:5-6

Who is your audience when you pray? I get uncomfortable when I am in a group of pastors for prayer. There is a temptation that comes within that group. The temptation is to pray for the other pastors to hear you rather than praying to the Lord. What words can I use to impress the other pastors? Can I quote some Scripture too? The longer I pray, the more spiritual they will think I am, so I gotta make sure to pray long enough. The temptation to be a hypocrite is very real. Then, even if you get past this initial temptation, the temptation continues during the act of prayer. You start getting some "yes, Lords" and "Amens." It makes you start to feel good. Then you want to keep saying things which get a response. All in all, I get uncomfortable because of this temptation in my own heart, and I see pride on display in the actions of others during those prayer gatherings.

When you pray, you have an audience of one. It doesn't matter who else is there, your audience is God. If you are not praying to God, then God is not going to respond. If you are praying for others to hear you, you are not truly coming before our Almighty King. God can't help you if you are praying to a human audience.

Take some time in prayer today. Shut the door and pray to the Father in secret. Cry out to Him. When you pray to God, He hears you. Hold on to that promise today. Take time to pray for yourself, your family, your friends, and your church. Your Father sees you in your secret place and will reward you.

Friday, February 25 - Matthew 6:7-13

Humor me for a minute. I grew up in the video game generation. I loved to play Super Mario Bros. I could play that game for hours, playing so much that I got blisters on my thumbs. I loved that game. On some of the levels, there was a puzzle to solve, a map to follow, so that you could get to the end of the level. You had to know the right way to go. Top level, then lower level, then here and there and over this obstacle or something like that. If you were successful, you moved on, but if you weren't, then you ended up right back at the beginning. It was a code to crack and when you cracked the code, you were victorious.

Too many people treat God like a level of Super Mario Bros. If I just pray a certain way, using certain code words, then I'll get what I want. If I just pray in a certain order and call God by the right name, I can win and God will give me what I want. This is what Jesus is warning about in verses 7-8. The Gentiles, worshippers of other fake gods, thought that their god was asleep or not paying attention until you said the magic code. Then, once you addressed the god or goddess in just the right way, you had his/her full attention.

Subtly, Jesus is saying that God is always ready to listen. God is always watching. There are no magic words which activate him because He's always

active. God knows what you need before you ask! So pray in this way, Jesus says...

We don't have to worry about saying the right words or "heaping up empty phrases" to win God's attention. You can just start talking to God confident that He is listening. Praise his name; ask for him to intervene in this life; ask him to provide what you need. He is listening. No code required!

Saturday, February 26 - 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Starting today and most Saturdays following, we will only have a question in this space which prompts us to reflect and contemplate over the reading.

Today's question: With the Holy Spirit inside of us, the veil has been lifted and the glory of the Lord is to shine on us as it shines on the Lord. In what areas of your life do you need to become more Christ-like?

Sunday, February 27 - Psalm 126

WEEK 2: PROTECT ME LORD!

Monday, February 28 - John 17:6-15

A man was on his deathbed. With some of his final words, he summoned one of his children who was by his bedside. The message given was that the man had not finished taking care of a house project and that it needed to be finished before winter. This man's life was spent taking care of other people and even in his final hours, he was thinking about others instead of himself.

Jesus was praying for others in his final hours on earth. He prayed for God to protect his disciples as Jesus had protected his disciples while he was on earth. Don't remove the disciples from the world, but protect them from evil while they are in the world.

As Jesus prayed for his disciples (we will see his prayer for you and I next week), we should pray for ourselves and one another. We don't want to be removed from the world, but we want protection while in the world. If we are removed from the world, we cannot follow Jesus' command to love our neighbors or go and make disciples. When we remain in the world, we will face temptation to become like the world and hatred when we act differently from the world.

When Jesus prayed this prayer, God answered by sending the Holy Spirit to protect God's people. Today, we have the Holy Spirit as well that can protect us from the evil one. Pray for protection for yourself and your church today. Pray that God protects us from the forces of evil and that we do not give in to the temptation of the world. Let somebody know that you are praying for them today.

Tuesday, March 1 - Exodus 17:8-16

Prayer matters. Our passage is a simple story which shows this to be true. When Moses has his arms raised in prayer, Israel is winning in battle; when he doesn't, they are losing. When Moses is praying, God acts on Israel's behalf; when he isn't, God is not acting.

It may not be that simple in our lives, but in a way it is. I do think this episode in Israel's history is an exaggerated example of God working. God is acting in this manner to prove a point to Israel that they need God's help. So, in our life, it may not be as simple as you have someone praying for you and you will find success; no prayer equals failure.

At the same time, the proof is in the pudding. Have you ever heard from a friend or family member distraught about a crisis? So you, along with several others, start to pray for God to intervene. And then, all of a sudden, you get a second phone call that the crisis is over. Has that ever happened to you? It has to me. God's people prayed; God took care of their problems. Prayer matters.

Write down a time in your life when you have seen God intervene because God's people were praying. Write these events down as a testimony to the goodness of God. Celebrate what the Lord has done in your life!

Wednesday, March 2 - James 1:19-27

Be quiet and get to work. Maybe not a perfect summary of the last half of James 1, but it is pretty close. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, but don't just listen! Go and do! I remember my mom telling us that "you have two ears and one mouth. Do the math." Let me extend that analogy. You also have two arms and two legs, so don't just sit there and listen, but be doers of the word as well.

More times than I would like to admit, I get distracted. Sometimes I will pull out my phone to see what time it is and I will get distracted by a notification or message. I put my phone down and immediately say "wait, what time is it?"

If we are reading the Bible proficiently, we must realize that action is part of faith. Christians are to be active in the world, taking care of people and loving one another. We are not just supposed to sit around and wait for Jesus to return. I want you to consider what you can do for the Kingdom of God over the next month. Not, what can the church do, but what can I do? Can I volunteer somewhere? Can I share comforting messages to "orphans and widows in distress"? Where can I act? If you have a thought, can you share it with the group when we come together for prayer meeting?

Thursday, March 3 - Luke 11:1-4

Did you skip over verse 1? I hope not because it gives us a key piece of information about teaching others. Most learning happens as you watch someone doing what you want to learn to do. Think of the first time you learned how to bake cookies or the first time you put a shelf on the wall. Think about teaching your kids to tie their shoes or vacuum. If I had to guess none of these things were done by just talking or reading instructions. They were learned and

taught by watching. When I was growing up playing baseball, the coach didn't sit us down and talk to us about baseball. He showed us how to pitch, hit, and run. You have to see how something is done before you know how to do it.

The disciples saw Jesus praying, and that is why they asked him to teach them. Your actions as a Christian can lead to conversations with other people about what it means to be a Christian. It can lead to opportunities to teach others how to pray, worship, and serve. Live your Christian life out loud for everyone to see. Do not live your Christianity out in a prideful way, but do not be ashamed for others may see you. You never know who is watching and who may benefit from seeing you do as God commands.

Friday, March 4 - Luke 11:5-13

The Lord is good is He not? The Lord is better than you is He not? You help other people eventually right? So shouldn't we trust God, who is better than you and I, to help and give even more quickly?

The story told in verses 5-8 is understandable. A friend eventually helps his friend, not because he wanted to, but because he wanted the guy to leave so he could go back to bed! Too often we leave the story here and get confused at who God is in this story? Wait, should we annoy God with prayer so God finally gives in to make us go away? That doesn't make sense.

It doesn't make sense and that is not the main takeaway of the passage. We are to persevere in prayer, but the point is that God will answer more quickly. He is not just trying to get us to go away, but he truly wants what is best for us. Ask, search, and knock and God will take care of you. After all, parents, who have no clue what we are doing (guilty!), at least know how to feed our kids and not give them things which can kill them. How much better of a parent God can be! He gives as we need. So ask and receive. Search and you will find. Knock and you will be let in.

Saturday, March 5 - Deuteronomy 26:1-11

This passage discusses the necessity of bringing one's first fruits to God. Are you bringing your best to God?

Sunday, March 6 - Psalm 127

WEEK 3: SANCTIFY ME, LORD!

Monday, March 7 - John 17:16-19

One fall while I was in college, it was more rainy than usual. The rain kept delaying our intramural sports. You see, what happens when sports keep getting delayed by rain is the officials of those sports are more apt to let you play when field conditions are not superb. You end up playing when earlier in the semester, they would have cancelled. So one night in mid-November, I played an ultimate frisbee match on a rain-soaked field which created a memory which will last a lifetime. (If you don't know what ultimate frisbee is, it is most like football except you use a frisbee instead.) On this particular night, one end zone was essentially a mud pit. During the match, my team was charging down the field trying to score by getting into the mud pit end zone. My teammate threw the frisbee in front of me so I could run it down and score a point. The throw was a little low so I dove for the frisbee. As I caught the frisbee, I slid through the mud pit a good twenty feet I would guess. And as I got up, I was covered in mud. It was the dirtiest I have ever been in my life (and it's one of my favorite memories of college). When I got back to my dorm, I had to take an extra long shower to scrub all of the mud off of me and be clean again.

Sanctification is being made clean. Justification is being made right with God. Justification is the initial work of salvation. Sanctification is what comes for the rest of your life. Jesus' prayer in verses 16-19 is that his followers will be sanctified in the truth, which is the Word of God. Jesus' desire is for his followers to be made clean, to be set apart, to be holy. His desire is for all of the mud of sin

to be washed off of our bodies. And so, as part of his last moments before being arrested, Jesus is praying for the Father to sanctify Jesus' followers. Jesus wants the Father to shower us with the truth to wash away the lies of sin. This has nothing to do with conversion but everything to do with salvation. Conversion is step one; it is being justified and forever forgiven of our sin. Sanctification is the rest of the steps; where God hoses us down and cleans us from all unrighteousness. Sanctify me, Lord! Set me apart!

Tuesday, March 8 - John 17:20-24

There was a scary moment during the summer of 2017 in my family. Micah was barely two years old and we took him to the doctor because he wasn't feeling well. When I got to the doctor's office, the doctor let me know how serious of a problem he had. His oxygen levels were below 95% and he needed oxygen. After upping his levels at the office, they sent us on to a pediatric hospital where we had to spend the night. While on the way to the hospital, I sent out a message to our Sunday School class at the time about what was happening. Then the text messages started coming to us. "I'm praying," "Praying now," "Let me know what I can do to help," "Praying." The reassurance to know that people were praying for Micah and our family gave us profound peace on a difficult day.

What profound peace it should give you to know that Jesus prayed for you on that night in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew what faced him over the next day and yet he was praying that all future followers of Jesus would be united as one. He prayed that we would be united so that the world could see the Truth found in Jesus. What selfless love Jesus showed by praying for us in a moment of great grief and strife for Him. How does it make you feel that Jesus knows you and that He prayed to the Father on your behalf?

Wednesday, March 9 - James 2:1-12

There is no room for favoritism or partiality in God's Family. The moment that a church starts catering to those with larger wallets or more influence in the community, they are in trouble. James points out that favoritism is just as much a sin as adultery or murder. I sure hope you wouldn't do either of those in the church, so partiality must not be in the church either.

I go to great lengths to not let giving habits influence my leadership of the church. I treat everyone equally (I hope I do that at least). I have procedures in place so that I do not know who gives nor how much they give. A funny story came out of these procedures in place. I received a call at the church from the bank one Monday morning about a problem with the Sunday Morning offering deposit; somebody had written the wrong date on a check. Since I did not want to know who was giving, I relayed that information to our Finance Committee for them to take care of. I received a call about an hour later from the Finance Committee to let me know that I was the one who put the wrong date on the check. I could have solved the problem in ten seconds with the bank, but because I did not want to know who was writing checks to the church, it took a few more people to solve the issue.

My point is that churches must have guards against favoritism. As individuals, we need to love our neighbor as ourselves, and we can't do that if we are playing favorites in the church. Of course partiality extends past money, but that is always the prime example. We are one body of Christ and no one person is more important than the other. Let us dive even more deeply into this sin during Bible Study this morning.

Thursday, March 10 - Luke 18:9-14

As church people, how often do our prayers sound more like the Pharisee than the Tax Collector? How often do we want other people to know how “good” we are instead of confessing our sins to God? How often do we say “thank you Lord that I go to church every week,” instead of “O, Lord help me?”

This parable reminds us that it is not our job to judge others or compare ourselves to others. Our prayers should not be about comparing ourselves to other people but comparing ourselves to God. When we compare ourselves to others, we are tempted to do as the Pharisee did: “thank the Lord I’m not a thief or adulterer like so and so!” But when we compare ourselves to God, there is a realization that we are not perfect. It doesn’t matter how we stack up with others, only God. And then we realize we need mercy from God. This state of humility is exactly where we need to be. Confess your sins to God right now. What has been burdening you? What sin has been weighing you down? Ask for mercy from the Lord and be justified.

Friday, March 11 - Romans 10:8-13

The most important prayer we can pray is the one when we ask God to save us. When we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that Jesus is Lord, we will be saved. Sing praises to God today that you have made that choice to call upon the name of the Lord!

But also remember the many who are dying without praying that prayer to ask Christ into their life. Pray for God to intervene in the lives of the lost so that they don’t remain lost forever. Who do you know who needs to make the decision to follow Christ? Take some time today to pray for God to intervene in their life. Pray that God will give you the strength to be bold in sharing with them the message of Jesus Christ. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work in their life, and pray that God’s people can come alongside those who are lost and help them be found.

Saturday, March 12 - Luke 9:28-36

Why did the Transfiguration take place? What purpose did it serve?

Sunday, March 13 - Psalm 128

WEEK 4: GIVE ME STRENGTH, LORD!

Monday, March 14 - John 17:25-26

With these two verses, Jesus concludes his prayer. In these verses, I hear a prayer for strength. Albeit subtle, Jesus asks for strength for himself. He is rehearsing what he has already done and reflects on why he is about to allow himself to be arrested, beaten, and crucified. "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Without the sacrifice which Jesus is about to give, the Father's love cannot be given to us. Jesus reminding himself of this is a subtle cry for strength from God. Help me, Father, so I can follow through with the plan. Help me, Father, to continue to make your name known. Do not let me fall into temptation, but give me strength to give up control. Lord, the world does not know you, and I must point them to you. Give me strength Lord, to give myself up so that others can know you.

I think it is important for all of us to pray like this. Let us all pray like Jesus! Let us pray that God strengthens us to realize that it is not about "me" but about "we". Let us pray that our lives make the Father known to the world.

Tuesday, March 15 - Matthew 26:39-42

In this garden when Jesus is praying must have been the most stressful moment of Jesus' life. This is the moment when he will decide if He will allow himself to be arrested or not. Will Jesus follow through on the plan? Will he save the world while sacrificing himself? Maybe we think that was an easy decision for

Jesus. But notice in verse 39 that Jesus threw himself on the ground; he fell on his face. Do people throw themselves on the ground if they are in a moment of tranquility?

Jesus did not have a death wish. He didn't want to die. But Jesus did as the Father willed. Jesus' obedience in this moment is an example for all of us in life. His obedience contrasts with the disciples. Jesus tells the disciples to stay awake, but they give into their physical desire and go to sleep. Whose example are you going to follow: Jesus or the disciples?

The life that God demands of us is difficult. God commands that we put other people's needs ahead of our own. God commands that we deny ourselves and take up our cross daily. God's commands on our life can lead to anguish, heartache, and throwing ourselves to the ground in consternation and prayer. But what happens next is the most important part. We can pray, then get up and do as the Lord requires. Or we can start to pray, then give in and fall asleep, never getting up to take our cross. What's it going to be for you today? Asleep or God's will be done?

Wednesday, March 16 - James 2:13-26

This passage might be the most quoted passage from James' Epistle...and the most controversial. The controversy stems from reading this passage in isolation when the early church would certainly have not. We will dive into a deeper study of that when we come together for Bible Study today.

I often have been troubled by the beginning of this passage. It is disheartening and frightening how much verses 15 and 16 describe what we do so often. Somebody has a prayer request in Sunday School. They need a ride to the doctor or something similar. We commit to praying for them, which, of course, is wonderful. However, there's no reason we could not be the answer to prayer and take that person to the doctor. How often do we say "go in peace, the Lord will take care of you" when we can fulfill their needs right then and there. If a

family needs food, God is probably not going to have food materialize in their pantry, but God is going to use His people to buy the family groceries. We must be the answer to people's prayers. Faith without works is dead.

Thursday, March 17 - Luke 18:1-8

I witnessed a funny event a few weeks ago. I was watching a mother with her toddler walking side-by-side. She had several things in her hands, but the toddler wanted to be picked up. She told him "no, I can't pick you up." But he was relentless, continuing to hold his hands out saying "up, up, up!" She kept saying "no, no, no" until finally she gave in and said "yes." Knowing the mother, I chuckled and said "what changed in the last few seconds?" She replied, "it was easier to just pick him up than hearing him whine the whole time."

Our story in Luke today is very similar to the passage we read on Friday, March 4. It is the same message of persevering in prayer. A widow is relentless in her pursuit of justice from a judge. As the story goes, she wears him down until finally he gives in. Now, don't get caught up in thinking that God is the unjust judge. If you do, you have missed the point of the story. The point is to think how much more a God who loves us will do than this unjust judge when we persevere. In fact, verse 8 says He will quickly grant justice to those who remain faithful. I hope we haven't given up on praying. I hope we aren't so disheartened to think that God is not listening. Even the unjust judge listened to the widow and answered her just to get her to go away. How much more will God grant justice to those who plead to him?

How did/does God grant justice? God justified us by dying on a cross. He brought the justice of the Kingdom of God by giving everyone an opportunity to become a citizen of the Kingdom. As citizens, we have access to the King at all times. We have access to a Judge who loves us. We have been justified by the one who roars like a lion and was sacrificed like a lamb. While we await the

second coming of the Son of Man, we continue to cry out, persevering in prayer, knowing that our requests are being heard and answered!

Friday, March 18 - Ephesians 6:18-20

What does it mean to “pray in the Spirit”? On Super Bowl Sunday, as I was driving home from church, there was a montage being played on the radio for the career of Tom Brady. Love him or hate him, he has been to and won more Super Bowls than any other football player in history. About fifteen years into his career, after already winning more Super Bowls than most teams have won in their history, he was quoted the week before his next Super Bowl appearance pleading to God “please, let me win one more. If I win one more, I’ll never ask for anything ever again. I know that’s what I said last time, but this time I really mean it.”

This is an example of how not to pray in the Spirit. We can clearly read these words and realize the error in this type of prayer. We are quickly frustrated by an athlete praying in this way, but do we pray like this too? “God, let me get this job and I’ll start volunteering at church again.” Or as kids, “God, let me get an A and I’ll go to church every week this month.”

To “pray in the Spirit” means to be guided in prayer by the Holy Spirit. It means to pray that the will of God is done. It means to not treat God as a genie but as the God of the universe who is worthy of our complete devotion and adoration. We pray not for things, but for the Kingdom of God to reign on earth as it does in heaven. We pray for the message of Christ to be spoken boldly in all corners of the earth.

Who needs your prayer today? Who needs you to persevere in prayer today? Take those people before the throne of the Lord and “pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.”

Saturday, March 19 - 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

The overarching message of this passage is for the Christians in Corinth to not be overconfident in their resistance to temptation. What happens when you get overconfident about your abilities to withstand temptation?

Sunday, March 20 - Psalm 129