



## **Theme: B.L.E.S.S.- Loving Others to Change the World** **“Begin with Prayer”**

### **Weekly Memory Verse:**

***<sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.***  
– Ephesians 6:18

*For this series of sermons, we invite you to read the book, **B.L.E.S.S. – 5 Everyday Practices to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World** by Dave and Jon Ferguson. We encourage you to pick up a copy, or download one, and **read chapter 3 this week**. The readings below will complement this chapter, focusing on the idea of friendship.*

**Monday, October 3** – Read Mark 1:29-39. As he worked miracles in his early ministry, Jesus was constantly surrounded by people who needed his help. He purposely rose “**very early in the morning**” to be alone with God, knowing that soon “everyone” would be looking for Him. He kept control of his schedule, so he could fulfill his mission throughout Galilee.

 If Jesus, who was God’s son, needed to be alone with God, it must be vital for us, with our cell phones always going off! Consider how your talks with friends change when you are one-on-one. What benefits do you see in solitary worship compared to community worship? Do you pray alone? If so, how do your prayers change in that setting?

 One of the biggest struggles people report with personal prayer is keeping their minds from wandering. If this is your struggle, try writing out your prayer and reading it aloud. As you read it, open your heart and imagination to sense God’s presence with you.

**Prayer:** *We invite you to pray this prayer daily this week.*

***Gracious God, I pause today to breathe in your Holy Spirit. I recognize that Jesus needed time with you and so do I. Help me to be aware of the people who come across my path today. I pray for (list any people here by name) \_\_\_\_\_. I pray for everyone I will interact with at (list any specific places here) \_\_\_\_\_. I realize some of these people and places may never have been prayed for by name. Use my prayers to BLESS them, and may my heart be changed as I lift these prayers to you. Give me direction to see***

***the people and places you long for me to BLESS. Help me to be the presence of your Son Jesus Christ by loving you, loving others, and sharing the Good News as I pray daily; listen well; enjoy food with others; serve in your name; and claim my story of how you have worked in my life. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.***

**Tuesday, October 4** – Read Mark 6:45-56. We all have days that require us to step away and refocus. Jesus had them, too. He had just fed 5,000 people miraculously and was about to walk out to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee and calm a storm. What did he do in between? He “went up on a mountainside to pray.” Prayer seemed to be the most renewing “break” activity in Jesus’ life.

 When are the best times for you to find a solitary place? Where are you most likely to remain undisturbed? Is there a time of day that you are most alert and focused? All these questions can help make your time with God more fruitful. Intentionally consider these questions as you plan your alone time with God this week.

 Though this mountainside likely wasn’t the place where Jesus usually prayed, when his inner and outer situation called for prayer, he found a place. How can you be ready for time with God when that moment suddenly appears during a hectic day? Try carrying a pocket New Testament with you or download the Bible onto your phone.

***Prayer: Use the prayer from Monday each day this week.***

**Wednesday, October 5** – Read Matthew 6:5-13. Jesus clearly did not regard prayer as “magic,” a matter of reciting the proper formula to get what he wanted. Quite the opposite—he said, “Your Father knows what you need **before** you ask him.” So, he didn’t mean the Lord’s Prayer as a fixed formula. It was, rather, a model of a simple, straightforward prayer, aligning us with God and God’s purpose.

 Jesus spoke of pagans who “think they will be heard because of their many words.” The prayer he taught was very short. On the other hand, the Psalms were Hebrew poems, neither short nor simple. Can you offer God either a simple prayer or a more extensive or elaborate one, depending on your situation and your need? How do you respond to the idea that there is no one “right” way to pray?

 Pray the Lord’s Prayer, phrase by phrase. Meditate on what each phrase tells you about God and what your inner response tells you about yourself.

***Prayer: Use the prayer from Monday each day this week.***

**Thursday, October 6** – Read Luke 11:1-13. Clearly the disciples believed that something they valued about Jesus came from his praying. They wanted to learn from him because they wanted to be more like him. Verses 9 and 10 seem to say that we’ll receive anything we ask for in prayer. Verse 13 may offer one key to grasping Jesus’ meaning: God **will** always give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks.

 Sadly, some earthly parents either neglect their children’s needs, or actively give them things that are bad for them. The Bible often used the “How much more…” rhetorical device Jesus used in verse 13. It distinguished God’s infinite love and generosity from our human frailty. In what ways did (or does) your earthly family reveal God’s qualities? In what ways do you need God to be “more” for you than they were able to be?

 Take with you today a simple breath prayer that Jesus promised God will always answer. As you draw in breath, silently start the invitation: “Come to me...” As you exhale, finish the prayer: “Holy Spirit.” Repeat at any point in the day where you need to.

**Prayer: Use the prayer from Monday each day this week.**

**Friday, October 7** – Read Luke 18:9-14. Luke said Jesus told this story, “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else.” Plainly Jesus’ focus was on the Pharisee. As he learned to trust God’s mercy, the tax collector could have prayed more confidently (see Hebrews 4:16: “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence”). The Pharisee **couldn’t** trust in God’s mercy—it never crossed his mind that he needed any!

 Which of the two stances in this parable are you more often drawn to: looking down on everyone else, or coming to God with a deep sense of personal need for grace? How can God’s love and grace help us maintain a healthy sense of spiritual need without sinking into a sense of contempt, either for others or for ourselves?

 An “examen” is a prayer for the end of the day to help us review the day through God’s eyes. At the end of this day, talk to God about these two questions: when were you most aware of God today? When were you least aware of God today?

**Prayer: Use the prayer from Monday each day this week.**

**Saturday, October 8** – Read Mark 9:14-29. In Jesus’ day, most of today’s medical and psychological insights didn’t exist. People called nearly all inexplicable ills—like the probable case of epilepsy reported in today’s reading, “demon possession.” The father’s plea in verse 24 feels familiar to most Christ-followers at times. He sounded like what many of have thought, if we are honest, “There is this part of me that wants to believe... I feel as though I need to believe... But it is all so completely illogical!”

 In this story, it seems that Jesus reveals that prayer is not a magical incantation but a total openness to God’s action in and through us. When we follow Jesus, we do not need to learn better techniques but instead be more receptive to the action of God in the world and in our lives. Effective prayer is a continuous posture, not simply an emergency procedure. What helps you to make prayer a “continuous posture” in your life, not just a “magical” or “emergency” way to control God?

 Scholar N. T. Wright, in his commentary *Mark for Everyone*, said Jesus came to rescue people, “from the destructive forces that enslaved them. So, whether it was shrieking demons, a woman with a fever, or simply whatever diseases people happened to suffer from, Jesus dealt with them all... Jesus had joined in a struggle against the forces of evil.” Are you ever tempted to shrug off the forces that cause suffering as just “the way things are”? In what ways have you, or will you, join in Jesus’ struggle against those forces?

**Prayer: Use the prayer from Monday each day this week.**