POWER ON

The key verse for this entire quarter is the Great Commission found in Matthew 28. We have already looked at making disciples in the previous weeks. But before that “make disciples” verb comes up, Jesus says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (v. 18). The word for authority in Greek is exousia which denotes power to act, jurisdiction, liberty, right, and domain. Throughout the four Gospels, Jesus used this exousia to cast out demons (Matt. 10:1; Mark 3:15), to heal the sick (Matt. 9:8; Luke 5:24), and to teach (Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:27). It was this same authority that His enemies questioned (Matthew 21:23–27; Mark 11:28–33, Luke 20:1–8).

This exousia is also the same power that Christ gives to humanity to become the children of God. In other words, the reason we can make disciples is that Jesus has been given authority to use His power to help us. The power of discipleship does not come from programs or even spiritual people and mentors. It comes from Christ, who continues to cast out evil from our lives, heal our diseases, and teaches us to live as He did on this earth.

Though people are called to make disciples, the power of discipleship is from God. In the next three weeks, we will look at the three means by which the power of God is manifested in discipleship: prayer, Bible study, and witnessing for Christ.
Write out Luke 11:1–13 from the translation of your choice. If you are pressed for time, you may write out Luke 11: 1–4. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or mind-map the chapter.
LEARNING TO BE SHAMELESS

It is uncertain how long the twelve disciples followed Jesus, but in their training they were taught to pray at one point (Luke 11:1–13). Luke’s account intimates that Christ was praying in a certain place for a certain amount of time (v. 1). Apparently, the exact place and the exact amount of time are not important, as Luke’s emphasis is on the disciples’ enamored response and desire to be taught.

This reveals a couple of points. First, prayer is neither a talent nor a gift or an innate ability. Some might place the act of praying on some higher level that only some individuals are good at. Some might think that God hears the prayers of some but not of others. However, prayer is a conversation between humanity and the divine—a skill that can be taught. Who better to teach bridging the two realms than Christ Himself, who came to be that Bridge? Have you asked Him how to pray? (Ironically, that in itself is a prayer!)

Second, there was something phenomenal and supernatural about Christ’s conversation that caused the disciples to ask for instruction. Whereas Christ was teaching and performing miracles, the disciples make it a point to ask Him directly about how He prayed. They may have seen others pray—the priests, Levites, Jewish leaders, and even the disciples of John. But Christ’s prayer was numinous; it caused them to wait until He finished praying before they made their request.

After modeling the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus presents a parable on prayer (Luke 11:5–8). While many other details and observations can be commented upon, the climax comes in verse 8, where Christ says, “Though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.” The word philo is Greek for friend and connotes a good friend, not a superficial acquaintance. What caused the man to get out of his bed in the middle of the night and risk waking his children? The word for persistence jumps out of the story. The Greek paints a shade to the word, where anaideia means shameless persistence or an unembarrassed boldness. It is this type of persistence that elevates a good friendship into an unblocked, raw, “shameless” one.
HOW MUCH MORE

In the old English, the word importunity is used where modern translations will use “persistence.” This persistence is the context for the famous promises of Jesus, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Luke 11:9, 10). In our prayers of asking, seeking, and knocking, we are to be persistent and determined in our actions.

But please do not misunderstand the context of the passage. The persistence has the foundation of relationship—Christ is highlighting both of these elements in our prayer lives. Some religions call for persistence and determination alone for a divine answer. Think of pagan contexts where impersonal offerings and rituals are conducted for favor. There is no merit in the tenacity of the pious by itself.

On the other hand, some versions of Christianity water down the relationship with Christ as a mere assent to His existence. James says, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19). Having a relationship with God—having a good, tight, bonded, strong, close, fervent, passionate, and powerful relationship with God—naturally results in your being persistent because you know the individual and have confidence in the relationship. This intensity is the feature in Christ’s statement, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13). In other words, if we selfish sinners can do good things for our children and for our persistent friends, how much more can an infinitely perfect Being do good things for His children and His persistent friends?

This mixture of relationship and persistence is seen in the life of Martin Luther. “From the secret place of prayer came the power that shook the world in the Great Reformation. There, with holy calmness, the servants of the Lord set their feet upon the rock of His promises. During the struggle at Augsburg, Luther ‘did not pass a day without devoting three hours at least to prayer, and they were hours selected from those the most favorable to study.’ In the privacy of his chamber he was heard to pour out his soul before God in words ‘full of adoration, fear, and hope, as when one speaks to a friend.’ (Merle d’Aubigne, History of the Reformation, b. 14, ch. 6)” (The Great Controversy, 210).
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

1 John 5:14, 15
Ephesians 6:10–18
Luke 18:1–8

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Jesus’ teachings and prayer?

AIR/PRAYER

In the Christian life, the new man of Christ is born in the heart and the old man is constantly denied. As in the physical body, three things must be done to keep the spiritual body alive. The second and third will be discussed in subsequent weeks, but the first has been covered this week. The words themselves rhyme in English: prayer is needed by the spiritual body just as much as air is needed by the physical body.

Without air/prayer, the body will be deprived of oxygen. Malaise, weakness, and fatigue will set in. In the busy-ness of life, the majority of Christians simply do not pray enough, and the prayers given are often limited to food, church services, and times of dire emergency. Just as we breathe constantly, in our spiritual lives we need to pray constantly, or as the Bible says, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Fresh air provides energy, vitality, and life. The lack of prayer results in weakness, desperation, the inability to communicate with others, and eventual death. Amongst the three necessities for life (as we will see in these three months of study), asphyxiation is the fastest method to die—physically and spiritually.

First, habits of prayer must be developed through discipline. Though that word often evokes disgust, discipline is integral to the disciple. It is God’s will that we develop the habit of regular prayer (1 Thess. 5:16–18). While the provisions of salvation have been made by the blood of Jesus and do not include the merits of human works, we can develop practices in our lifestyle and routines that keep us mindful of Christ’s salvation. Without the power of regular prayer, disciples lose their hold on God, and many slowly leave the fold of Christ, indifferent-ly and imperceptibly.

Second, prayer helps us recognize that we are in the midst of spiritual warfare. We are disciples of the Lord Jesus, and spiritual opponents seek to pick off each of us, His followers. Prayer continues to unite us with our Master and provides a level of both offense and defense against the forces of darkness. Rather than directly attack us, the devil often tries to keep us away from the power of God in prayer. Whether it’s through the monotony of our prayer lives or the empty content of our prayers, he tempts God’s people to look at the art of prayer as a commonplace and tedious habit.

Third, when we have the example of Jesus Christ before us and the presence of the Spirit mindful in the present, then we will naturally pray relationally and persistently. It’s not a matter of formulas, mechanics, and the configuration of the prayers; it’s about the connection of two beings together through the realness of the actual relationship; it’s the time spent together despite the needs of the day; it’s the meeting of thoughts, emotions, and their exchange; it’s the supernatural flow of powerful blessings from heaven to earth, from divine to human, from God to us; it’s the breathing of heaven’s air while dwelling on the earth beneath, just as Jesus did.
Review the memory verse. How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the chapter, what personal applications are you convicted of in your life?

What practical applications must you make in your prayer and devotional life?

PRAYER POWER

“Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be substituted and the health of the soul be preserved. Prayer brings the heart into immediate contact with the Wellspring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience. Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God. The spiritual faculties lose their vitality, the religious experience lacks health and vigor. . . .

“Prayer is heaven’s ordained means of success in the conflict with sin and the development of Christian character. The divine influences that come in answer to the prayer of faith will accomplish in the soul of the suppliant all for which he pleads. For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; and the promise is, ‘Ye shall receive.’ . . .

“Satan presents many temptations to the youth. He is playing the game of life for their souls, and he leaves no means untried to allure and ruin them. But God does not leave them to fight unaided against the tempter. They have an all-powerful Helper. Stronger far than their foe is He who in this world and in human nature met and conquered Satan, resisting every temptation that comes to the youth today. He is their Elder Brother. He feels for them a deep and tender interest. He keeps over them a constant watch-care, and He rejoices when they try to please Him. As they pray, He mingles with their prayers the incense of His righteousness, and offers them to God as a fragrant sacrifice. . . .

“By your fervent prayers of faith you can move the arm that moves the world. You can teach your children to pray effectually as they kneel by your side. Let your prayers arise to the throne of God, ‘Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?’ . . .

“Jacob prevailed because he was persevering and determined. His experience testifies to the power of importunate prayer. It is now that we are to learn this lesson of prevailing prayer, of unyielding faith. The greatest victories to the church of Christ or to the individual Christian, are not those that are gained by talent or education, by wealth, or the favor of men. They are those victories that are gained in the audience chamber with God, when earnest, agonizing faith lays hold upon the mighty arm of power. . . .

“Shall all our devotional exercises consist in asking and receiving? Shall we be always thinking of our wants and never of the benefits we receive? Shall we be recipients of His mercies and never express our gratitude to God, never praise Him for what He has done for us? We do not pray any too much, but we are too sparing of giving thanks. If the loving-kindness of God called forth more thanksgiving and praise, we would have far more power in prayer. We would abound more and more in the love of God and have more bestowed to praise Him for. You who complain that God does not hear your prayers, change your present order and mingle praise with your petitions. When you consider His goodness and mercies you will find that He will consider your wants.”

(Prayer, 84–88)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How often do you pray?

Where is spiritual power specifically needed in your life?

What kinds of shame prevent us from having a powerful prayer life with God?

How can prayer become dangerous when only persistent?

What are assumptions that we make about prayer that make it inert?

How would one diagnose a lack of air/prayer in the spiritual life?

How many of your prayers have been based on promises that God has given through Scripture? How many of them were answered? How many of them do you remember?

How close are you with the Holy Spirit in prayer?

What’s the longest you’ve held your breath spiritually?